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NATIONAL FOOD STAMP CONVERSATION 2000

Transcript of Proceedings, at 1816 South
Figueroa Street, Los Angeles, California,
commencing at 1:00 p.m., Thursday,
August 31, 2000, before Paula B. Renteria,
Certified Shorthand Reporter No. 9374.

1 MS. WATKINS: Good afternoon. I'm Shirley
2 Watkins, the under secretary for Food, Nutrition and
3 Consumer Services with the United States Department
4 of Agriculture. And I want to welcome all of you to
5 our several in a series of Food Stamp Conversations
6 around the country.

7 We're delighted that you have chosen
8 to spend some of your precious time with us this
9 afternoon, talking about issues that are near and
10 dear to each one of you as well as to all of us.

11 I want to thank our Western Regional
12 Office for all of the support and preparation that
13 has gone in today's conversation.

14 And I especially want to thank our
15 regional administrator, Allen Ng, who has been
16 extremely supportive in helping us to ensure that
17 our final conversation is the best conversation.

18 MR. NG: Thank you.

19 MS. WATKINS: Thank you, Allen. Also with
20 me this afternoon is the deputy under secretary
21 Julie Paradis, who is in the Washington headquarters
22 office with me.

23 And I'm going to ask Allen Ng to
24 introduce the new deputy regional administrator, who
25 is very, very new. Allen.

1 MR. NG: I'd like to introduce to you John
2 Chandler, who's the new deputy regional
3 administrator. This is his fourth day on the job,
4 and he's learning very quickly.

5 MS. WATKINS: Thank you very much. We want
6 to make certain that this afternoon's conversation
7 is responsive and appropriate for all of the
8 customers and clients that we serve.

9 We're here to listen to you. We're
10 not here to answer any questions. We want to find
11 out what you think about the program and how we can
12 make this the best program ever.

13 We need your input. And we greatly
14 value your contribution to the discussion this
15 afternoon.

16 Before we get underway, I'd like to
17 spend just a few minutes describing the purpose, the
18 goals, and the next steps. And I'd also like to put
19 into perspective the program's history and
20 functions.

21 I realize that many of you probably
22 know as much about this program or more about this
23 program than I do or you wouldn't be here today.
24 But I think a brief overview would be helpful just
25 to frame our conversation.

1 The Food Stamp Program had its
2 beginning as far back as the Depression. The
3 original intent, as stated in the Food Stamp Act,
4 was to strengthen the agricultural economy, achieve
5 a more effective use of food abundances, and to
6 provide for improved levels of nutrition among
7 low-income households.

8 The program, as we know it today,
9 began as a pilot back in 1961, and it was made a
10 permanent program in 1964.

11 The program expanded dramatically
12 after 1974, when Congress required all states to
13 make the food stamps available to low-income
14 households.

15 The Food Stamp Act of 1977 made
16 significant changes in program regulations, it
17 tightened eligibility, criteria, and also tightened
18 the administration of the program. And it removed
19 the requirement that food stamps be purchased by
20 recipients.

21 Since then, the program has grown
22 reaching an all-time high of almost 28 million
23 participants in March of 1994. The current
24 participation level is around 19 million per month.

25 Food stamp households are a diverse

1 and a wide-ranging group, representing a broad
2 cross-section of the nation's low-income population.

3 Let me just share with you what that
4 food stamp population looks like today. Over half
5 of the recipients are children and another 8 percent
6 are age 60 or older.

7 The majority of the households do
8 not receive TANF benefits. They receive cash
9 assistance from supplemental security income, Social
10 Security, and state general assistance.

11 9 percent of the food stamp
12 recipients have no income of any kind. 26 percent
13 of the recipients work and, for these households,
14 those earnings are the primary source of family
15 income.

16 Only 10 percent of those working
17 families make enough to put them above the poverty
18 line. 37 percent are at or below the poverty line.

19 The average food stamp household has
20 only \$118 in countable resources, including
21 vehicles, checking and savings accounts.

22 The average food stamp household is
23 small. It's around 2.4 percent. I don't know where
24 that 4 percent of a person comes from, but anyway,
25 that's the way the statisticians figure it.

1 However, there are households with
2 children that are relatively large, averaging about
3 3.3 members. Households with elderly participants
4 were smaller, with an average size of 1.3 members.

5 The last of May, we hosted the
6 National Nutrition Summit in Washington along with
7 HHS. There were many, many people there who had a
8 chance to discuss a variety of subjects.

9 One of the sessions that we
10 sponsored was entitled, "The Face of Hunger in
11 America." One of our guests was Sharon Thornbury,
12 and she was a former WIC and a former food stamp
13 recipient. And we were all struck by a number of
14 things that she shared with us, and I want to share
15 those with you today.

16 She told us that these programs did
17 not make her dependent. They helped her to succeed.
18 Sharon now is a self-reliant, self-sufficient, very
19 confident person, and she owes all of her success,
20 she said, to the helping hand that she and her
21 family got from the Food Stamp Program.

22 And I think as we go through these
23 discussions today, and the final discussion in the
24 series, that we need to keep Sharon's words in mind.

25 We have to make sure that the Food

1 Stamp Program continues to help families to succeed,
2 and we are hoping that your suggestions today and
3 the ones that we've heard in the other six
4 conversations will be the key to helping us make
5 these positive changes.

6 We're very proud of the Food Stamp
7 Program. It has done a lot of wonderful things for
8 a lot of wonderful people all over this country for
9 a number of years now.

10 We want to see what else is it that
11 we can do to make this program better; what can we
12 do to enhance the program; how can you provide us
13 solid information that will make the difference in
14 the decisions that are made for reauthorization of
15 the Food Stamp Program.

16 We have given to you, and I hope you
17 picked it up as you came in today, the guiding
18 principles for the Food Stamp Program.

19 And we think this is an important
20 summary of what we believe the program should be and
21 what we believe are the real reasons for the program
22 and how it should function.

23 When you take a look at these
24 principles, bear in mind that improved nutritional
25 well-being is the ultimate measure of success in the

1 fight to reduce hunger and improve nutrition.

2 This principle is the foundation of
3 the program, and it is at the heart of the original
4 intent of the framers of the Food Stamp Act.

5 This really is at the core of why
6 we're here and why we want to have your
7 participation in these series of conversations.

8 As we approach reauthorization
9 during 2002, it is especially important that we do
10 everything to make the program as strong and as
11 responsive as we all know that it can be.

12 Since we want to get input from a
13 broad variety of people -- As I've indicated to you,
14 we've had conversations around the country at six
15 different locations, and Los Angeles is the last
16 one, the last stop in these series.

17 I guess the beginning was in
18 Washington, D.C. We had one in Atlanta, New York
19 City, Chicago, Kansas City, and last week Julie and
20 I were in Dallas.

21 And I've said in each one of these
22 cities, we're here to listen to you, and we want to
23 make certain that we can provide the time for you to
24 provide information for the benefit of this program.

25 I want to turn the program now over

1 to Julie, who will give you a few words about the
2 logistics and some of the keys for the day that will
3 keep it successful. Julie.

4 MS. PARADIS: Thank you, Shirley. Let me
5 also sort of add my welcome to you. It's a real
6 privilege and thrill for me to be up here with
7 Shirley.

8 As many of you may know, Shirley and
9 I don't often travel together, because there's so
10 many people that we want to talk to that it works if
11 we split ourselves up.

12 But Shirley thought that these
13 conversations were so critical and so important that
14 she said, Julie, I want you or Sam Chambers, the
15 administrator, to accompany me for each one of these
16 conversations.

17 So this is just to let you know how
18 important your input is this afternoon to what we're
19 doing at FNS.

20 You know, our vision statement says,
21 We will lead America in ending hunger and improving
22 nutrition and health. It doesn't say we will end
23 hunger, but that we will lead America in ending
24 hunger.

25 You all here today represent all of

1 our partners who, with us, are committed to ending
2 hunger in America. So please don't ever
3 underestimate the value of what you do. We don't.
4 Or we certainly try not to. We are ever mindful and
5 inspired by the work that you do.

6 Indeed let me talk about a few
7 housekeeping things so that we can get started. We
8 are transcribing everyone's comments this afternoon
9 so that there will be a record. Not one word will
10 be lost from each of these conversations. And
11 anyone who is interested in that transcript can let
12 us know, and we'll be happy to send it to you.

13 It takes several weeks for us to get
14 it, but anyone who is interested in a transcription
15 of today, please let us know and we will get that to
16 you.

17 In the meantime, we hope in the next
18 week or so to have a summary document on our web
19 page that will reflect the first several
20 conversations that we have gotten the transcripts
21 back from.

22 And we'll be making changes to those
23 as we have a chance to review the transcripts from
24 the subsequent conversations.

25 And ultimately we will have,

1 hopefully by the end of September, early October, a
2 summary document that everyone can access that will
3 try to pull all of the comments together in some
4 sort of fashion so that it's in a readable format.

5 We'll be taking callers this
6 afternoon from people who, for whatever reason,
7 weren't able to get here. They have got a phone
8 number and they can call in.

9 The nature of that being what it is,
10 what we're likely to do is to accommodate those
11 callers by postponing a speaker so that we can take
12 the callers as the call comes in.

13 And we also have available signers.
14 So if there's anyone here who has difficulty hearing
15 and would benefit from signers, please let folks
16 know at the table at the back and we can do that.

17 I don't know that we'll use them
18 unless we need to. But if you need that, we have it
19 available. And we also have people with bilingual
20 skills available. So just to let you know that we
21 are trying very hard to accommodate all kinds of
22 folks.

23 We'll probably take a break about
24 3:00 or 3:30. But in the meantime, as people need
25 to come and go, please feel free to do that.

1 And Allen, what have I missed? What
2 kinds of things do we need to tell them?

3 MR. NG: Basic stuff. The rest rooms are
4 on the first floor. The men's room is on the right;
5 the women's room is on the left, as you leave the
6 auditorium. There's handicap accessible rest rooms
7 on the second floor. Just take the elevators up.

8 And we do also have handouts on the
9 table outside to your left, handouts talking about
10 the Food Stamp Program, give you some information
11 about the Food Stamp Program and how it will apply.

12 MS. PARADIS: We look forward to your
13 comments.

14 Anyone who would like to submit
15 written comments, what we've been telling everyone
16 at the previous conversations is that they had until
17 August 31st to get us their written comments.

18 Today being August 31st, I wonder if
19 we might give these folks another week.

20 MS. WATKINS: Yeah.

21 MS. PARADIS: Maybe by the end of next
22 week. If you can get us your written comments,
23 we'll be able to accommodate those into everything
24 that we put together.

25 And I think we're ready to get

1 started, Shirley.

2 MS. WATKINS: Great. Thanks, Julie and
3 Allen. Why don't we begin.

4 We have someone on the line. Do we
5 have a caller?

6 TELEPHONE OPERATOR: Mary Ellen Florence
7 (phonetically) from Compton, California.

8 MS. FLORENCE: Yes.

9 MS. WATKINS: Hello, caller.

10 MS. FLORENCE: Yes, my name is Mary Ellen
11 Florence, and I'm from Compton, California. And I'm
12 a senior citizen and on Social Security.

13 And my comment is this: A lot of us
14 senior citizens, we own our home. And I've tried to
15 get food stamps. And they had told me I was not
16 eligible because I own my own home, but I still owe
17 on it and I have to pay a house note every month.

18 By the time I pay the house note,
19 utilities and medications, I have no money left for
20 food.

21 So I wondered if -- why are we not
22 allowed to get food stamps, the senior citizens that
23 own our own home. Because we have to live
24 somewhere. We would be paying rent somewhere else.
25 And my comment is that.

1 MS. WATKINS: Thank you very much,
2 Ms. Florence.
3 MS. FLORENCE: Pardon?
4 MS. WATKINS: Thank you very much. We have
5 your comments and we appreciate you calling in.
6 MS. FLORENCE: Thank you.
7 MS. WATKINS: Bye-bye.
8 MS. FLORENCE: Bye-bye.
9 MS. WATKINS: And now we'll start with our
10 first person who wants to kick off the conversation
11 after Mary Florence, and that's Ken Hecht.
12 And I would just ask that you please
13 state your name. Sometimes I may not get the names
14 correct, and I want to be sure that you have an
15 opportunity to tell who you are and which
16 organization you represent.
17 MR. HECHT: My name is Ken Hecht. I'm from
18 California Food Policy Advocates. First of all, I
19 thank -- Welcome and thank you. It is inspiring and
20 gives us some hope of real change to see the four of
21 you out here wanting to hear what this audience has
22 to say. Thanks.
23 California Food Policy Advocates is
24 California's statewide antihunger policy and
25 advocacy organization.

1 And our mission, if I can get it
2 straight, is to improve the health and well-being of
3 low-income Californians by increasing their access
4 to nutritious, affordable food. And that is
5 certainly food stamps.

6 Perhaps the most important thing for
7 me to say today is to remind you of the terrible
8 truth that here in California, where all the food
9 comes from and where all the prosperity is
10 happening, there are roughly, according to your
11 figures, 4 million people who are hungry or in peril
12 of being hungry. And those are the people we need
13 to make sure the Food Stamp Program serves.

14 At the moment, I guess we're
15 estimating about 1.8 million people in California
16 are benefiting from the program. And we're
17 estimating that is roughly half of the eligible
18 population.

19 All of this is happening, of course,
20 before the TANF time limits really set in.

21 We know from a study being released
22 today, which we will hand you later in the
23 afternoon, that the proportion of people in
24 California eligible for food stamps is going up at
25 this time in prosperity and that the proportion of

1 eligible people participating in the program is
2 going down.

3 It's a very initial set of data, but
4 we see it as certainly a warning light for everyone
5 that this program has got to work better.

6 In trying to determine the problem
7 with food stamps, a program that we love and depend
8 on, my thought is that the program has become
9 antiquated and that what we need to do is to
10 streamline it, simplify it, and modernize it.

11 In streamlining, I guess the
12 observation which is just overwhelming to many
13 people is the bulkinization of USDA food programs.

14 There are so many programs. There
15 are so many different applications, so many
16 different eligibility criteria.

17 It is exceedingly difficult for
18 someone to thread his or her way through that
19 thicket to access the program we want them to
20 access.

21 There are some models of how to do
22 it better. Direct certification, for example, which
23 takes people automatically from food stamps into the
24 child nutrition programs is a supermodel of just
25 what we want to have happen.

1 There ought to be one point of
2 access. That person's in need at home, that
3 person's in need at school, and can get the
4 nutrition he or she needs in either place.

5 There ought to be some study given
6 to the combining of applications and eligibility
7 criteria, not just within the food programs, but
8 between the food programs and the other federal
9 benefit programs designed to help exactly the same
10 population.

11 By those programs, of course, I'm
12 meaning TANF, SSI, the health insurance programs.

13 Simplify. I think the best way to
14 simplify is to change the focus from assets to
15 income.

16 We have other programs that are
17 trying to build assets for low-income people. It
18 seems very curious to penalize them for those exact
19 same assets.

20 If there were a focus on income,
21 then the inquiry of every applicant becomes a whole
22 lot simpler.

23 My vision is that when someone goes
24 to file an income tax return, those numbers will key
25 off the EITC mechanism and the food stamp mechanism.

1 That's all you need to know, what that person's
2 income is, to know that that person needs food
3 stamps. That's simple.

4 Modernize. I think there are two
5 elements to this: One is we have to recognize
6 welfare reform, what it's done, what it means, what
7 the population of food stamp recipients now is and
8 what we want it to be.

9 And I'm, of course, talking about
10 working families. We've got to design the program
11 so that it works for them.

12 And secondly, we've got to come into
13 the computer age. We've got to be able to take
14 advantage, as the medical side of things is doing,
15 of the ability to apply and to keep being certified
16 on-line, without the face-to-face visits, which is
17 so extremely difficult for working families and for
18 everyone.

19 Those are my comments. Thank you
20 very much again.

21 MS. WATKINS: Thank you very much. Willis
22 Brown. Is Willis Brown not here?

23 If Willis Brown comes in and wants
24 to speak, you all will just let us know.

25 Michelle Ingebo.

1 MS. INGEBO: Good afternoon. My name is
2 Michelle Ingebo, and I'm representing the state of
3 Oregon.

4 In the '60s, I was a recipient. I
5 had food stamps when we used to have to stand in
6 line at the bank and buy them. It wasn't much fun.
7 I'm really glad we have the cards now.

8 In the '70s, I became a food stamp
9 worker. I started fighting the system in the '70s.
10 Here in 2000, I'm still fighting. The mind-set that
11 we have is to deny people.

12 The applications are federal, but
13 they throw their own applications on top of them.
14 That I brought to Salem's attention.

15 The pending process, instead of
16 sending a fax or sending a release to an employer,
17 it's up to the client to get that information, and
18 it's never exactly what they want. A simple phone
19 call could provide the information.

20 The mind-set is to not assist, to
21 put them off until they're frustrated.

22 Now I am also working at a community
23 action agency, and I'm also the food share
24 coordinator for Wasco, Sherman and Hood River
25 Counties. We cover three of the largest counties in

1 the state of Oregon.

2 With that, we are a highly
3 agricultural and tourist area. Our jobs are minimum
4 wage, which is another thing. In Oregon, minimum
5 wage is now 6.50 an hour. The food stamps income
6 did not go up.

7 The clients not only are making more
8 money, they've lost food stamp benefits, they've
9 lost their subsidized benefits, they've lost their
10 Oregon Health Plan, but they're not getting any
11 medical coverage from their employers because
12 they're not working them 30 hours or more.

13 This is going on all over the state
14 of Oregon, but it's extremely true in our area.

15 Not having at least 20 hours, they
16 have a mandatory job program that they need to go to
17 for food stamps, which is a great thing, but it is
18 not in the person's level.

19 A person with 16 years of education
20 is the same thing with a ninth grade drop-out. They
21 are sat there and told, take a shower, brush your
22 teeth, this is what's suitable for employment, this
23 is not. It's not in any layer depending on the
24 person's skills.

25 They go to this class in the

1 morning, and then in the afternoon, they're supposed
2 to go out and look for work.

3 Anybody knows you look for work in
4 the morning so that they know you're actually going
5 to get up and do it. But that doesn't happen.

6 The vehicle resources, that hasn't
7 increased in I don't know how long. My girlfriend
8 was working for a dentist. She had been driving a
9 Volkswagen forever. She got herself a new car. The
10 dentist had a heart attack. They closed the
11 business down. She got her unemployment, could not
12 get food stamps.

13 I mean, she hadn't made her first
14 payment on that car. And it wasn't like she was out
15 there getting a very expensive car to party on. She
16 needed a vehicle.

17 The limits are so low, you can't buy
18 a car these days with those sort of limits. It
19 hasn't been increased.

20 The summer months -- One of the
21 other things is that these standards, the utility
22 standards and the shelter standards, really do need
23 to be increased.

24 In our area, people are paying
25 50 percent and more of their disposable income just

1 on rent. We're not including the utilities, we're
2 not including the car, the car insurance.

3 Most of the clients I'm dealing with
4 right now don't have car insurance because they have
5 to choose whether they can eat or use insurance.

6 And that really adds up, because
7 they get in an accident, may not be their fault,
8 they get a ticket, now they've lost their license
9 and they're in a world a hurt. And I see this
10 repeatedly because I also do the emergency intakes.

11 During the summer, everything goes
12 down for food stamps. That's great. They're using
13 their summer standards. But the kids are home.
14 They're not in school, having free lunches.

15 At least during those summer months,
16 please increase that, because those kids eat. I had
17 four of my own sons at home when I was getting food
18 stamps. Believe me, I know they can eat, everything
19 in the house. And those are the really bad months.
20 During the winter, you can have the school lunches
21 and the school breakfasts.

22 The Food Stamp Program has been
23 excellent. I have been a client. I have been a
24 food stamp worker. I'm now an advocate. I am also
25 the food share coordinator.

1 Our food stamp offices tell them,
2 Well, you're going to have to wait for your
3 appointment, but you can go to a food box and get an
4 emergency food program. Why can't they see them.
5 Why can't they see them then and give them their
6 cards if they're income eligible.

7 I have had to assist my clients
8 filling out the applications. I've also had to pick
9 up the phone and tell the worker, This person is
10 eligible. What did you ask and why didn't you ask
11 that.

12 And I don't know if it's just
13 Oregon, but from what I've heard, the workers'
14 mind-set is, Do not let them have it. Keep them
15 off.

16 And if somewhere it could come from
17 the top saying this is an entitlement, if this
18 person is eligible, let them have them.

19 It's not like the old days when you
20 could, quote, "sell your food stamps." You've got a
21 card. They're buying food.

22 And I have to admit in the days when
23 I had to purchase my food stamps, I did have to sell
24 them so I had the money to get food stamps. If I
25 was entitled to 150, I may have had to spend \$75.

1 In 1965, my welfare check was \$172 a
2 month, with two children, and my rent was \$85 a
3 month. So you try to figure out where I put any
4 other money and why I was having to, quote, unquote,
5 "sell" those food stamps when I got the full amount.

6 So getting this amount that the
7 family is entitled to is a wonderful thing. And it
8 also entitles them with all the other programs, with
9 the school lunches, with the school breakfasts.

10 We have a phone reduction. But a
11 lot of people won't go get food stamps because they
12 just don't want to be hassled. It's not worth it to
13 them. I convince them it is worth it to them, but
14 I'm not talking to everybody in the state of Oregon.

15 So for me to say I like your
16 program, I've liked it for 30 years, and I've used
17 it for probably 15 or 20 of those 30 years.

18 I've also paid back society. And
19 I'm helping my clients, because it's something
20 they're paying taxes on, they're entitled to, and
21 they shouldn't be hassled every time they try to get
22 ahold of that.

23 Thank you for listening to me.

24 MS. WATKINS: Thank you. Nancy Weed.

25 MS. WEED: Good afternoon. I'm Nancy Weed,

1 and I'm here to represent the Oregon Hunger Relief
2 Task Force. And I know that Julie and Allen have
3 already heard a little bit of what I'm going to say,
4 so I'll be very brief.

5 But I do want to let you know about
6 a food stamp outreach project that is taking place
7 right now in Portland. It's a joint effort between
8 several social service agencies with the goal of
9 enrolling more eligible families and individuals on
10 the Food Stamp Program.

11 And what we did is basically design
12 a series of posters and flyers and brochures in
13 English, Spanish, Russian and Vietnamese. And each
14 piece includes a 1-800 number for people to call to
15 a health and human services agency, called the
16 Oregon Safe Net.

17 When they call the number, they are
18 given basic information about food stamps, where the
19 nearest office is, what the hours are, what kinds of
20 information to bring with them to the interview and
21 some basic income eligibility information.

22 And Safe Net is also referring
23 callers to the WIC program and to the Oregon Health
24 Plan and they're tracking the demographic data of
25 the callers for us.

1 We've taken our outreach materials
2 to all the elementary schools in the area, summer
3 food sites, head-start centers, food pantries,
4 churches, community centers, libraries, senior
5 centers, health clinics, et cetera, et cetera,
6 apartments, Laundromats.

7 And although our evaluation will be
8 completed in September, we do now have -- we're
9 seeing the numbers of callers continuing to rise
10 every month.

11 Our preliminary welfare office
12 caseload data is showing an extreme rise in east
13 Multnomar County compared to other comparative
14 populations in the state.

15 And we've been given a green light
16 by state administrators to go ahead and take the
17 food stamp outreach statewide in Oregon starting in
18 the fall of 2000.

19 But I myself am an ex-welfare mom
20 and used food stamps to support myself and my kids
21 as I got myself through my undergraduate degree and
22 then as I got my master's degree.

23 And I know for a fact that I would
24 not have been able to complete my education if I
25 didn't have low-income housing and food stamps to

1 get us by.

2 I was able to get by going to school
3 full time by working part time with the support.
4 And I feel very strongly about the need to continue
5 that support.

6 So to me as an ex-client, knowing
7 that Oregon is number 1 in hunger in the country, it
8 begs the question, why aren't more people using food
9 stamps.

10 So we conducted a series of client
11 focus groups with families, seniors, individuals,
12 and also with service providers, and identified
13 several barriers.

14 Some of them were very specific.
15 While the immigrant populations we spoke to had a
16 huge fear that information would be improperly
17 shared with INS; seniors, for example, they seemed
18 to be the population most likely to equate food
19 stamps negatively as welfare and see it as most
20 stigmatizing to use, and they also seem to be
21 uncomfortable using our Oregon Trail card instead of
22 the food stamp coupons.

23 But aside from specific concerns, we
24 did identify five basic areas of client-identified
25 barriers. The first being that office branch hours

1 and locations were often inconvenient for clients to
2 go to.

3 Oftentimes, in Oregon, clients are
4 required to come and show up at 7:30 in the morning
5 on a first-come-first-serve basis, which often
6 requires taking the day off of work. You may or may
7 not be seen that day; you may or may not have to
8 come back and take another day off.

9 The second barrier we identified was
10 that many clients were confused or misinformed about
11 eligibility and access. There is a huge
12 misperception in Oregon that when you became
13 ineligible for TANF benefits, you also became
14 ineligible for food stamps.

15 The third barrier we identified was
16 that the process involved way too much paperwork.
17 And indeed, Oregon's food stamp application is
18 14 pages long, and it includes several excess
19 verification forms that are not required for the
20 majority of clients. Time and time again, the
21 application came up as a barrier.

22 So we did take a work group, and I'm
23 very proud to let you know we now have a food stamp
24 application that's four pages long. If we put the
25 four pages back-to-back, we're talking a two-page

1 food stamp application for clients. And it's for
2 food stamps and employment-related day-care. For
3 clients who need TANF and Oregon Health Plan, we
4 have another two-page.

5 We're going to take this and test
6 pilot, also in East County, and work out any bugs
7 and get worker approval, and hopefully we'll be
8 taking that statewide also, as soon as possible.

9 The fourth barrier we identified is
10 that many clients are apprehensive about being
11 treated poorly in an AFS office, in a welfare
12 office. They dread having to walk in to apply.
13 They see AFS as punitive. They see food stamps as
14 stigmatizing.

15 And the fifth and final barrier that
16 we identified is that there are many potential
17 clients who are low income and are needing help, but
18 who are considered over-income for benefits.

19 And indeed, Patty wants me to submit
20 to you e-mails which she received from groups across
21 the country, talking about that very issue.

22 Toward that end, we have a couple of
23 suggestions we'd like to make at the federal level.
24 To raise the gross income limit from 130 percent of
25 the federal poverty level to 185 percent of the

1 federal poverty level, such as WIC programs or
2 school lunch programs are.

3 And as you'll see when you read some
4 of these e-mails, many people are also in support of
5 that.

6 We'd like to eliminate asset
7 verification requirements so that people, as you've
8 already heard, can own that reliable car, that they
9 can get to work. And also, that they should not
10 have to deplete their savings or their retirement
11 funds in order to get food stamps.

12 We'd like to see the minimum benefit
13 raised from the \$10 it is now to \$50. We're seeing
14 a lot of folks, especially elderly and disabled
15 folks, who are on fixed income, who go through this
16 mountain of paperwork and only get \$10 a month.

17 We'd also like to see an automatic
18 transitional benefits to people leaving TANF roles.
19 We think people should just get a year automatically
20 as they're leaving TANF, to help them become
21 self-sufficient. Let's just give them food stamps
22 for a year.

23 We'd also like to see automatic
24 benefits for people who are already -- for families
25 who are already enrolled in WIC or Medicaid

1 programs.

2 We'd also like to see the
3 face-to-face interview requirement removed. We'd
4 like to see phone or mail or e-mail recertification,
5 so that people, again, don't have to miss work to
6 come into the office to apply or to be recertified.

7 We'd like to see the removal of
8 restrictions on ABAWDs, on Adult -- What is that?
9 Adults without kids.

10 We'd also like to see benefits
11 restored to legal immigrants, regardless of their
12 age and regardless of the time they entered the
13 country.

14 And we would like you to set
15 national standards for food stamp outreach,
16 including national standards for office hours and
17 outstationing workers.

18 We would also very much like to just
19 remarket the whole Food Stamp Program, especially in
20 Oregon. We're not using coupons anymore. We're
21 using Oregon Trail. Maybe we should call it
22 something else.

23 There must be something we can do to
24 reduce the stigma of the program. Just even on the
25 ride over here from the airport in our shuttle bus,

1 I got in a really interesting conversation with the
2 driver and the other passengers.

3 It's not just -- Many people think
4 food stamps are welfare. They think people who use
5 food stamps are slackers. And we, as a society,
6 need to do something about that. And I think you
7 guys would be the perfect place to start.

8 And finally, we just -- It's
9 extremely important that we do keep food stamps as
10 an entitlement. There are many, many hungry people
11 in this country depending on you folks for that.

12 Thank you very much.

13 MS. WATKINS: Thank you. Paula Chavez.

14 MR. JACKSON: My name is not Paula Chavez,
15 but my name is John Jackson. And Paula graciously
16 traded cards with me so that I would be able to
17 speak and go and do some of the work that I have to
18 do.

19 MS. WATKINS: Okay. And who are you?

20 MR. JACKSON: My name is John Jackson. I
21 work with the community organization ACORN.

22 ACORN is the Association of
23 Community Organizations for Reform Now that works
24 with low and moderate income communities in 40
25 cities across the country. It has a membership of

1 about 125,000 people, households, in 40 cities.

2 But we also here in Los Angeles have
3 a membership of welfare recipients and general
4 relief recipients that we would like to pay -- not
5 go to a lot of the statistics that have already been
6 brought forward, that are similar here in California
7 as they are in Oregon, but we would like to put some
8 faces and some of the graphic stories and some of
9 the hardships that people actually have gone through
10 as a result of some of those failures of these
11 policies.

12 And I'm going to start with a person
13 that we tend to think is really a hero of the
14 community that is in the process of raising her
15 great grandchildren, a woman that was a teacher's
16 aide, that was earning an income, and her
17 granddaughter got butchered in the streets of Los
18 Angeles in a drive-by shooting.

19 She took up the challenge of raising
20 her great grandchildren because the grandmother, who
21 was the child's mother that died, was unable to do
22 so.

23 And she went to apply for benefits.
24 Instead of being treated like the revered person
25 that we tend to think that she is, she was treated

1 pretty shabbily and denied food stamps because she
2 earned some money by being a teacher's aide.

3 Yet again, being a champion of the
4 community, doing a service to the community, she was
5 rewarded with being treated shabbily and they told
6 her that she could not receive food stamps for those
7 children that she was attempting to raise.

8 Instead, her retirement money had to
9 go toward helping those kids. And she graciously
10 did that. But should she have had to do that is the
11 real question. Should she have had to do that. We
12 think not.

13 But I just wanted to put the
14 contents of other people from ACORN; that we have a
15 1-800 phone number here in Los Angeles that is
16 utilized by welfare recipients across the county
17 when they are having problems with accessing the
18 benefits that they're entitled to.

19 And we go in between them and the
20 welfare department to try to make sure that they get
21 those things that they're entitled to. That number
22 is being utilized by welfare recipients. And we
23 resolve, in our office, probably 200 of those type
24 of cases, or better, per month.

25 And we just think that in terms of

1 food stamps, here it is in the times of economic
2 prosperity in this nation, and yet the divide
3 between rich and poor is growing and we're
4 considering adjusting how we administer benefits to
5 poor folks in this country. It's amazing.

6 But what's also amazing to me is
7 that this room, as many people that benefit from
8 food stamps in one form or another, is less than a
9 quarter filled. That's amazing.

10 I don't know who did the outreach
11 for the conference or this speech or whatever it's
12 coined as, but it's startling to me that people
13 don't feel enough of a vested interest in these type
14 of issues to be here.

15 Maybe it's because it wasn't
16 outreached to them in a way that made sense to them
17 and made them feel comfortable, instead of plans
18 being made for them. We tend to think people just
19 in general want plans made with them.

20 And so I understand this is a
21 gallant attempt to make plans with people for the
22 reshaping of the food stamps, but the outreach
23 portion of it probably is lacking in some ways,
24 because as evidence of the room being empty as it
25 is, it's a shame. It's a shame.

1 This is probably one of the populace
2 cities in the nation, and yet we have less than 50
3 people here talking about food stamps. It's
4 amazing.

5 But yet, you know, I'm not trying to
6 take away from this effort, because I think that it
7 is a gallant effort. I think more of these efforts
8 need to go forward. But I also think that maybe, in
9 some ways, they can revise the way that they do
10 outreach for these things.

11 But back to the woman that we
12 consider the hero in the community that was denied
13 the food stamps, she, through calling us, probably
14 may be entitled to some food stamps now, but she
15 went years without receiving those food stamps,
16 years going out of her pocket, her retirement money,
17 to invest in some children that she just happened to
18 feel the need to try to take care of.

19 And those types of stories go
20 unheard. Those type of people go without the
21 applause and recognition of the federal government
22 or any public entity at all.

23 But those are the true heroes of
24 this country, of these cities, of these communities.
25 But we don't seem to be able to focus in on them.

1 We're concerned about the quality of
2 life in the communities that we're working in, and
3 one of the ways is by working with those people.

4 But again, there will be other
5 people from ACORN that have some of those case
6 complaints that come into our office, that were
7 written up, that they're going to share with you
8 when they come to the podium.

9 Thank you for your time.

10 MS. WATKINS: Thank you. James Gibbons.

11 MR. GIBBONS: Hi, my name is James
12 Gibbons. I'm currently a food stamp recipient. I'd
13 like to start by expressing my appreciation for you
14 people coming out here and attempting to make some
15 improvements in the Food Stamp Program.

16 I also am very grateful for some of
17 the organizations, like ACORN and the Coalition to
18 End Hunger and Homelessness, who work very closely
19 with food stamp recipients in the community and try
20 to resolve some of the problems that we deal with.

21 Before I was aware of some of these
22 organizations, I would have to try to resolve
23 problems that frequently occur. It seems like every
24 month, there's something different. Always a
25 different problem. Sometimes it's always the same

1 problem. They lost your CA-7 form or you didn't put
2 something right down on the form. It's always
3 something different. Always something new.

4 But as a result of these problems,
5 you don't get your benefits. You don't get your
6 food stamps. And the cold reality of that is, when
7 you don't get that, you don't eat.

8 There have been occasions, in my
9 experience, where I wasn't living in an area where
10 there were services available. And if you're not
11 living in an area where there are services
12 available, you just do without. It's as simple as
13 that.

14 I've gone two and three days without
15 eating at times, because there was just nothing
16 available. Oh, yeah, I could have gone downtown if
17 I had a bus token where there are services,
18 missions, but I didn't have a bus token. I didn't
19 have food stamps.

20 I've had to walk as much as 12 miles
21 to the welfare office to clear up a simple problem
22 where a phone call would have sufficed if we had
23 some competent people working in the office.

24 One of the other problems that you
25 deal with frequently is that the staff in the office

1 treats you like a second-class citizen. They don't
2 even want to talk to you.

3 They always assume that you're
4 wrong, that you did something wrong, and they'll
5 never accept responsibility for a mistake that
6 happens. You're treated like a second-class
7 citizen, as I said. And they don't even want to
8 talk to you.

9 I've gone to organizations, such as
10 the Coalition to End Hunger and Homelessness, and
11 had some of their staff try to resolve problems for
12 me that I couldn't resolve.

13 Even two and three trips to the
14 welfare office, where I actually spoke, got the
15 opportunity to speak to somebody, I still was unable
16 to resolve the issue.

17 I've had to go to a mediator, such
18 as one of the community organizations, in order to
19 resolve the issue. It was very simple to resolve.
20 Ultimately it turned out that it was their mistake.
21 But they wouldn't even listen to me.

22 It wasn't until an outside
23 arbitrator stepped in and spoke to them that they
24 would even listen to the issue.

25 And basically, I'd like to summarize

1 it by saying that they need to be more responsive to
2 the recipients and not treat them like they're
3 second-class citizens, just because they happen to
4 be in unfortunate circumstances where they are in
5 need of assistance.

6 Thank you very much.

7 MS. WATKINS: Thank you. Charles Tharp.

8 MR. THARP: Hi, my name is Charles Tharp,
9 and I thank you for taking your time.

10 MS. WATKINS: Charles, if you can speak
11 into the mike.

12 MR. THARP: I have gone down and applied
13 for food stamps in the past and they found I had a
14 vehicle and they accused me of spending the money,
15 unemployment money, and driving around and using up
16 all the money on gas.

17 I told them no, I use the bus. I
18 only use the money, the gas, if I have work. And
19 they have accused me of being dishonest and
20 everything.

21 You'll have to excuse me. I was
22 involved in an accident.

23 And I've gone to different stores,
24 like I go to Mayfair Market to buy ice, and they
25 say, Well, you can't have the ice. It's not

1 qualified. So I'd have to leave it there, go over
2 to Ralph's, and buy the same product.

3 And then they have this setup where
4 you can't buy crushed -- I mean, you can only buy
5 crushed ice; you cannot buy block. To me block
6 would last longer, and so you're wasting more food
7 stamps in that way.

8 And I've gone over to Mayfair Market
9 where I see them -- They can't sell a certain item,
10 like ribs or chicken. And what they'll do is
11 they'll cook it and put it in a warmer and keep it
12 there.

13 And then I'll go there just before
14 it's over with, before the day is over with, and
15 they close, and they take that food and throw it in
16 the trash, where someone like me, who is unable to
17 cook, can benefit from that, but we can't have that
18 because it's hot prepared food.

19 That's about all I have to say.

20 MS. WATKINS: Thank you very much. Rickey
21 Mantley.

22 MR. MANTLEY: Hi, my name is Rickey
23 Mantley, and I'm here on behalf of the Coalition to
24 End Hunger and Homelessness.

25 And I want to preface my remarks by

1 saying that I am among the 9 percent that the under
2 secretary alluded to in opening remarks, who has no
3 income and who practically uses food stamps as their
4 only source of income. So that means food stamps to
5 me are a lifeline.

6 And I'm here to say that that
7 lifeline is constantly being threatened every month
8 because of a CA-7 reporting requirement.

9 Now, what I have to say about that
10 requirement is that every month the County requires
11 you to fill out the CA-7 form, and they mail you
12 this form, and they say the form should be turned in
13 by the 5th of the month.

14 Sometimes you do not get the form
15 until the 4th, so that means if you mail it in, they
16 will not receive it by the 5th. Or what invariably
17 happens is that this form is not received. Because
18 I'm constantly, every month, getting these
19 threatening notice of action letters.

20 And these notice of action letters
21 state plainly: We haven't received your CA-7 form,
22 so we're threatening to cut off your food stamps
23 until you come in and make the reporting
24 requirements, which means you do have to make a trip
25 down to the office, however inconveniencing that

1 might be for you.

2 If you had other plans that day or
3 other things, you're going to have to go down to the
4 office and personally fill out the CA-7 form and go
5 through the rigmarole required to turn in that form,
6 down at the DPS office.

7 And it's very frustrating and
8 discouraging to know that you are meeting the
9 requirements of the program, that you are filling
10 out the forms, you're mailing the forms in, and they
11 never receive the forms. You don't know what
12 happened. And they offer you no explanation about
13 why they haven't received the CA-7 form. But again,
14 you're given the bureaucratic runaround, and it's
15 very discouraging.

16 And again, I have here a report
17 that's been issued by the California Food Policy
18 Advocates, and they make clear that's one of the
19 recommendations of the report, is that there should
20 be a quarterly requirement as far as filling out
21 these CA-7 reports.

22 And I think that's an excellent
23 recommendation, because you shouldn't have to be
24 required to fill out these forms monthly. I mean,
25 it's a lot of hassle involved. And again, there's

1 so many bureaucraties in this reporting requirement
2 that it's ludicrous.

3 So I think the quarterly requirement
4 is the minimum that should be allowed for food stamp
5 recipients.

6 Someone might raise the issue of
7 fraud being involved, but you don't stranglehold
8 recipients for fear that fraud is going to raise its
9 ugly head, because with these requirements and these
10 restrictions, you're practically putting a
11 stranglehold on the recipients.

12 You're saying, We're so fearful that
13 you're going to commit fraud, that we're going to
14 practically hammerlock you in an effort to make sure
15 that you don't commit fraud.

16 Well, the issue of fraud is always
17 going to be prevalent in the program, and there's an
18 equitable way to deal with this issue.

19 And I think, again, the CA-7 has
20 become a farce, because how is it that they mail you
21 the forms and they never receive the forms when you
22 mail them. And you're forced to go down there.

23 And sometimes I have to fill out
24 four or five, six, seven forms to make sure one is
25 filtered through to the appropriate person so I

1 would receive my food stamps the following month.

2 So that's my major complaint on that issue.

3 And there's other issues I can
4 raise, like one of them being that we are issued a
5 food stamp card.

6 And things that happen in the past,
7 you might be required to wait in a long line at the
8 food stamp outlet, because from the 1st to the 15th,
9 there are these humongous lines that you must wait
10 in to get to the window so you can have your card
11 swiped and be issued your food stamps.

12 And what's humiliating and very
13 embarrassing is to get up to the window and then
14 you're told that your card has been reported lost or
15 stolen, a card that you have handed to these people,
16 plainly has your name on it, especially if you have
17 California I.D. accompanying the card or you have a
18 green food stamp card; you hand someone the card and
19 they say it's been reported lost or stolen. Now,
20 that's ridiculous. But they'll say now you have to
21 go down to your worker and get a new card issued.

22 There's been times when I had four
23 or five white cards, you know, because every month
24 the card was reported lost or stolen.

25 Again, there should be an effort

1 made to simplify the process and to, I don't know,
2 take the bugs out of the computer system or whatever
3 is required to make sure that -- really, that the
4 recipients are not humiliated in this fashion.

5 And again, food stamps are my
6 lifeline right now. If I didn't have the food
7 stamps, again, I'd be forced to eat at the missions.
8 I do happen to live in the downtown area and there
9 are a lot of missions.

10 But again, there's the issue of sort
11 of the erosion of human dignity and self-worth
12 that's involved in standing in line, to be issued
13 handouts by these charitable institutions.

14 And you know, again, food stamps
15 give you some measure of some worth and some dignity
16 as a human being and, you know, it's nice to be able
17 to go out and buy your own food, instead of having
18 it handed to you like you're a child who can't feed
19 yourself.

20 So food stamps make possible, you
21 know, the amount of self-worth and self-confidence,
22 maybe so you can go out and get a job so that one
23 day you find yourself not depending on food stamps.

24 Again, that's probably all I have to
25 say on the issue, and thank you very much.

1 MS. WATKINS: Thank you. Tyrone Roy.

2 MR. ROY: My name is Tyrone Roy, and I am a
3 homeless person. I agree with much of what I've
4 heard so far today.

5 Before I begin with what I want to
6 say, which is a little bit more humanistic and not
7 so bureaucratic, is I would suggest that you people
8 on this panel -- It's just a suggestion, of
9 course -- that you multiply whatever you've heard
10 from many of these people, by a thousand, you could
11 say, because they're not here, but these problems
12 are so systemic because they're happening every day.

13 And as a food stamp recipient and a
14 homeless person, I haven't heard anything that I
15 haven't experienced as long as, you know, it
16 pertains to my situation.

17 But I want to get up here, I want to
18 say that the bottom line is, it's not enough money.
19 And I'd like to illustrate how I see and how I feel
20 and how I've been impacted by this not enough food
21 stamps.

22 The USDA, ever since I was a kid,
23 they've been talking about the minimum daily
24 requirement. You cannot get the minimum daily
25 requirement on the amount of the mathematical

1 formulas of the food stamp allocation.

2 And I'd like to demonstrate what
3 happens to the effect of this lack of the minimum
4 daily requirement through food stamp programs like
5 food stamps.

6 I see in my community, and I've
7 always seen it, that people, young ladies, for
8 instance, with their children, when they get their
9 food stamps, there is a great joy in the community.
10 I mean, the kids have popcorn, they have peanuts,
11 they have Cracker Jacks.

12 It's not, of course, USDA food, but
13 I'm getting to that. But this is a reaction. A
14 reaction to, I believe, people going half the month
15 or maybe three-quarters of the month with some food
16 and then being daunt of food in the house and you
17 have suddenly -- You have people who -- It's like on
18 Christmas Day. You open the packages. You have
19 your food.

20 Hopefully your food stamps are there
21 and they've not been discontinued for some false
22 reason. But you have people having food.

23 And there's this rush, this manic
24 depressive type of thing. They're depressive
25 without this food, their children are depressive.

1 And then they suddenly have all this great wealth
2 from wherever and they're buying things.

3 And you see this behavior going on
4 of conditioning people to -- Simply because it's not
5 enough to carry, so you have a stability
6 of continuity -- a continuity of stability
7 throughout the month. It's creating problems. It's
8 creating problems. I wanted to say that.

9 I can go into it deeper, but I would
10 like to bring it back to myself. I am homeless,
11 like I said, and I receive food stamps.

12 And I noticed one thing. If I want
13 to get this USDA minimum daily requirement -- And
14 one gentleman talked about the hot food, the
15 inability to get hot food under the policy of the
16 Food Stamp Program.

17 If I want to get hot food and I go
18 to Von's, and all of them are currently switching
19 over to a deli-type program where there is hot food
20 available, cooked food that's available, you can buy
21 the cold stuff, but the only way you will get that
22 hot food, and if you don't have any money, is to
23 take a single \$1 food stamp, go to the store and buy
24 a single pack of chewing gum, which costs a quarter.

25 You will get the 75 cents. And you

1 do that a few times and you can go and buy that
2 chicken or that fish or whatever it is that's hot,
3 because you cannot buy it under the rules of the
4 Food Stamp Program.

5 And I'm going to end what I have to
6 say. It just needs to be taken a look at.

7 And you also have sort of -- not me,
8 but you get a manic depressive type of behaviorism
9 about this thing too when you're without. I don't
10 have any food stamps. Today is the 31st day, but my
11 food stamps ran out.

12 And it is more expensive. It is
13 much more expensive when you buy one item at a time
14 than if a person goes and buys a whole package at a
15 discounted price.

16 If you buy one item at a time, your
17 food stamps are guaranteed -- If you're homeless, of
18 course I'm saying -- your food stamps are guaranteed
19 to expire long before the month expires.

20 And I think you people need to take
21 a look at that too. Thank you.

22 MS. WATKINS: Thank you very much. Emma
23 Figueira. I probably am really messing up your
24 name, so please give us the correct pronunciation.

25 MS. FIGUEIRA: You're as close as anyone

1 ever is.

2 My name is Emma Figueira, and I come
3 to you from Phoenix, Arizona.

4 I represent the Community Action
5 Association for Arizona. And we represent community
6 action programs and agencies throughout the state as
7 well as we are a membership organization and we
8 represent organizations and individuals who have an
9 interest in eliminating poverty in Arizona.

10 So I want to tell you -- start with
11 a little bit of sort of a picture of what Arizona
12 looks like with regards to our food stamp population
13 right now.

14 We have experienced, since 1996 and
15 the welfare reform, we've experienced the fastest or
16 one of the largest declines in our food stamp
17 population in the United States.

18 We have had a 43 percent decline in
19 our food stamp population -- or participation rate.
20 And with our current poverty estimates, we predict
21 that nearly 645,000 Arizonans are eligible, but
22 currently not receiving food stamps. So we're
23 particularly concerned about the barriers that
24 exist, many of which, all of which, probably you've
25 already heard here today.

1 But I'm going to give you a list
2 again of those that -- We polled our membership over
3 the last two weeks to learn more about what their
4 direct experiences with clients have been.

5 And I've submitted written comments
6 on all of their comments, but I want to share with
7 you just some of the key categories that we found.

8 I also want to preface this by
9 saying that our food stamp administration, program
10 administration within the state of Arizona, is
11 working hard to address many of these issues. And
12 they are making changes.

13 But we're bringing these to your
14 attention because we feel like the backing of the
15 federal changes could support further action at the
16 local level in our case and in other states.

17 So first I'd like to talk to you
18 about the application and certification process.
19 This is a really hot one for us. We are looking at
20 a simplified application.

21 We have a pilot project in our state
22 right at the moment, but the length of the
23 application and the amount of information that's
24 required for verification needs to be simplified and
25 streamlined.

1 The allotment size is inadequate for
2 seniors, in our estimation. We've been going around
3 the state this past year holding senior focus groups
4 to talk about the food stamp program and barriers
5 that seniors are experiencing, and the allotment
6 size is the top issue. Ten dollars a month for a
7 senior on SSI is not sufficient. It's not
8 sufficient, particularly in rural areas where
9 transportation to markets is a real issue.

10 Customer service has arisen as a
11 central issue in all of this. No matter how much
12 outreach and what kind of benefit level there is, no
13 one is going to come in if they receive bad customer
14 service and they're treated in a humiliating
15 fashion.

16 And if there was some way at the
17 federal level that we could create some standards
18 for monitoring this aspect of customer service -- of
19 the service delivery aspect, that would be helpful.

20 Resource limits for both automobile
21 and for general resources need to be expanded. The
22 automobile resource -- The necessity for an
23 automobile is particularly imperative in our
24 environment where we have great distances that
25 people must travel to get to their place of

1 employment, and there's virtually no transportation
2 publicly available. Some within the city of Tucson
3 and Phoenix, but outside of that area, very little.
4 So we ask that that be -- a single car be considered
5 necessary per household.

6 In addition, increasing the general
7 resource limit per family to encourage savings and
8 asset development. We spend a lot of time talking
9 about asset development. It needs to be a priority
10 of this program as well.

11 USDA monitoring we have found to be
12 something that's sort of underlying a lot of the
13 customer service issues and the problem with
14 processing applications.

15 The fear of fraud within our
16 department that is administering the food stamp
17 program is so pervasive that, at every level,
18 they're taking additional time, taking extra
19 precautions, and they're viewing everyone who comes
20 in as a potential fraud person.

21 So if there's some way to adjust the
22 monitoring process and rely more heavily on
23 standards of customer service and delivery and that
24 sort of thing, rather than the fraud aspect, that
25 might improve the program.

1 And finally, legal immigrants and
2 able-bodied adults need better access to this
3 program.

4 We're very certain that a good deal
5 of our decline has to do with our legal immigrant
6 population between the ages of 18 and 65. And we
7 would like to see that program expanded back to this
8 population as well as to able-bodied adults who, for
9 one reason or another, cannot find employment.

10 I thank you for being here today and
11 allowing us to submit our comments to you. And
12 that's all I have. Thank you.

13 MS. WATKINS: Thank you very much. Laura
14 Turrentine.

15 MS. TURRENTINE: My name is Laura
16 Turrentine and I'm currently a recipient of food
17 stamps and I'm a working mother of four.

18 I've just been moved by some stories
19 here, so kind of bear with me.

20 MS. WATKINS: It's okay. Take your time.

21 MS. TURRENTINE: The current Food Stamp
22 Program certification and recertification process
23 makes it difficult for people, working families like
24 myself, to stay in the program.

25 I have one example. There's

1 several, but -- I got a notice of appointment,
2 which I got the notice Saturday, and I had an
3 appointment for Monday.

4 And most people where they work,
5 they cannot just go to their boss and say, you know,
6 I need this time off, all of a sudden, on Monday.

7 So I -- And at that time -- I have a
8 good boss now and I had a good boss then, and it was
9 something I was able to do, but it was a busy time.

10 We were preparing for a conference,
11 and stuff like that, and it was something she would
12 rather me not go to. And I really needed to be in
13 the office that day.

14 So I called and I said, I got this
15 notice late and I said -- And I said, I got this
16 Saturday and I have an appointment Monday. And I
17 said, I can't just go to my boss and say, Can I take
18 off. I said, Can I reschedule this appointment.

19 And the person on the phone told me
20 that I would have to come the next day in as a
21 walk-in and show up at 7:00 a.m. in the morning and
22 hopefully be seen. And if not, then I would have to
23 come back another time and try it again and that I
24 could very well stay there all day and not even be
25 seen. So that would take more time from work, so I

1 went ahead and went to the appointment.

2 The thing that would help most for
3 me -- I mean, for people that are like me that are
4 working would be like longer certifications. Ours,
5 in Arizona, it's three months. Every three months
6 we had to recertify.

7 We had to go do a new application,
8 and it's a full application, and go to the interview
9 and ask the same questions they asked. Because I
10 was getting food stamps before welfare reform, and
11 then we changed it to welfare reform, and it was
12 great, I've been working, but it hasn't worked for
13 the people that are working.

14 I mean, it did some things. It did
15 like the job -- you know, looking for jobs and all
16 that. And I was really glad that we had that.

17 Another thing I was thinking that
18 would help is like maybe a simpler application,
19 maybe like a two-page application for
20 recertification. Maybe the full application for
21 like first time coming.

22 But for recertification, maybe a
23 shorter application, be able to like fax and mail
24 like the verification stuff, like paycheck stubs
25 that might change, bills that change, and stuff like

1 that.

2 Maybe be able to do like phone
3 eligibilities and fax the stuff too, you know,
4 everything you need. And if they need anything
5 more, be able to call us.

6 Expanded hours I think would be
7 good, but I think it might be harder to do, because
8 then the people would have to work longer and would
9 have to probably make more money, you know, so that
10 might be harder to do, but expanded hours would be
11 good.

12 Basically I only wanted to talk
13 about one more thing, about the resource. Car being
14 a resource is not really a resource. It's an
15 expense. You have to pay cash insurance, you have
16 to fill your tank with gas, you have to do regular
17 upkeep of your car and then if anything breaks down.

18 In Arizona you really need a car. I
19 spent my first year and a half going on the bus to
20 work, but it's like a lot of work, especially with
21 four children, to try and carry around diaper bags
22 and what else you have.

23 So once I got the car, I was very
24 excited. And I am just -- It's like down to its
25 breaking-down point now, and I'm wondering if I get

1 a new car, how it's going to affect me, you know.

2 And also, with savings, if we can't
3 save, how are we ever going to get to the point
4 where we need to get so we don't have to utilize the
5 food stamps, so we can have money for our plans, for
6 our children, for our future.

7 I guess that's all I have to say.

8 MS. WATKINS: Thank you very much.

9 MS. TURRENTINE: Thank you for coming.

10 MS. WATKINS: Debra Garcia.

11 MS. GARCIA: Good afternoon. My name is
12 Debra Garcia, and I'm a policy analyst with
13 Consumers Union, based in San Francisco.

14 I'm also the beneficiary of the USDA
15 Food Stamp Program as a child. My family was able
16 to make ends meet by having access to food stamps,
17 so I'm grateful for the program being here, also for
18 the opportunity to -- that you all have provided to
19 hear from people whose lives have been directly
20 affected and are being directly affected today by
21 food stamp programs. And I'm hoping that it's --
22 Well, we'll see what happens after you carry out
23 what we've heard today.

24 The specific area that I want to
25 talk about is Electronic Benefit Transfer. And you

1 know Electronic Benefit Transfer is the new way to
2 deliver food stamp benefits. For those of us in
3 California, it hasn't been implemented yet. We're
4 in the process now.

5 And to that end, to making -- to
6 implementing Electronic Benefit Transfer in
7 California -- I'm sorry. I was distracted by the
8 applause over here (indicating). Not deserved yet,
9 but -- EBT has the potential to produce stigma of
10 food stamps that I think many of us in this room
11 have experienced.

12 But not only that, it also has the
13 possibility of not being just a benefit delivery
14 system, but also a gateway or an entryway for people
15 to become involved in mainstream financial system by
16 having to use a debitlike card.

17 And I know Oregon and I believe
18 Arizona is already on-line with this. Again,
19 California is hopefully about to go on-line.

20 But anyway, to that end, Consumers
21 Union has published a report called Electronic
22 Benefit Transfer Programs Best Practices to Serve
23 Recipients, where we surveyed ten different states
24 and came up with a list of best practices that we
25 are hoping California will implement, but that also

1 other states, as they come on-line or as they
2 reassign their contracts, will also take a look at
3 and consider implementing in their states.

4 When we were looking at best
5 practices, of course, we also saw some of the flaws.

6 And one of the things that I am
7 hoping that you all will look at is the fact that
8 you have a private company, a very large private
9 company, Citicorps Services, Incorporated, who are
10 the main contractors for EBT delivery.

11 They have over 30 states that
12 they've already contracted with. They're the sole
13 bidder for the California contract. And that's who
14 we're negotiating with.

15 We're a little concerned they have a
16 bit of -- a bit too much power in being able to make
17 policy decisions that is your job as opposed to a
18 private entity, like Citicorps. So we're hoping
19 there's some way that more players can be brought
20 into the bidding process.

21 Also, as you know, Citicorps has had
22 some problems in terms of computer shutdowns that
23 have affected, in the months of May -- or June, July
24 and August anyway, that have made it so that
25 thousands of people were not able to access their

1 benefits with their EBT card. In addition, that
2 also made it so that retailers weren't earning
3 money.

4 So we're concerned that people
5 aren't getting their food and also that manual
6 vouchers, of course, they could be used, but a lot
7 of recipients don't know to ask for a manual voucher
8 to be written up and a lot of retailers don't want
9 to take the time, when they have other people in
10 line, to fill out a manual voucher. So it's very
11 often said, Sorry, the system is down. The
12 recipient has to come back another time to try to
13 access their benefits to get food on the table.

14 Another thing that we're concerned
15 about, that we found nationwide, and we're going to
16 be facing that in California, is being able to use
17 Farmers Markets and how is EBT going to be using
18 Farmers Markets.

19 So far we haven't seen anything
20 where it's been used very effectively. And this is
21 a cost-effective and nutritious way for people to
22 get access to fruits and vegetables.

23 So we're hoping that somehow, with
24 all the information that we have, that somehow there
25 can be a solution for Farmers Markets. And possibly

1 looking at the wireless technology that's being
2 looked at in other states.

3 The last thing I want to talk about
4 is lost or stolen cards. And I know that there is
5 an issue of fraud, and that was one of the main
6 issues -- the reasons that USDA went to EBT.

7 But when a person loses their card
8 and they don't know it right away and don't have a
9 chance to report it right away, their food stamps
10 can be gone.

11 I mean, if the person is lucky
12 enough to guess the pin or knows the pin because
13 perhaps it was your authorized representative,
14 whatever it is, that somehow you lose your benefits
15 when you lose your card, there needs to be a way so
16 that people are protected if they happen to lose
17 their card or the card gets stolen.

18 And we're hoping that you can find
19 an innovative way to offer protection to consumers
20 and recipients who are using the card as opposed to
21 the old coupon method.

22 So I've talked mostly about the
23 problems and, again, that's because some of the best
24 solutions, best practices, are contained in this
25 document. And I'm hoping to leave a copy with you

1 today. Thank you for your time.

2 MS. WATKINS: Thank you.

3 As you might imagine, we may have to
4 rearrange some of you who have scheduled to speak
5 because of various and sundry opportunities for
6 people who have come today. And now has come that
7 time. I'd like to ask Amy Joy, Sandra Alvarez and
8 Olga Hernandez.

9 MS. JOY: Good afternoon. Thank you for
10 squeezing us in.

11 My name is Amy Block Joy, and I'm a
12 faculty member at U.S. Davis and also the principal
13 investigator and director of the FSNEP program.
14 That's the Food Stamp Nutrition Education Program
15 for California.

16 I've worked with FSNEP and AFNEP for
17 over 21 years. FSNEP is a nutrition education
18 program serving California counties. We're in 40
19 different counties in California.

20 The purpose is to help our
21 participants improve their health and increase their
22 self-sufficiency.

23 We offer the program statewide and
24 serve about 10,000 families a year and 17,000
25 youths. Families enrolled in FSNEP receive

1 nutrition education tailored to their individual
2 needs.

3 Our staff receive up-to-date
4 training on research-based material from the
5 University of California.

6 Today I've brought with me one of
7 our program families to provide testimony of the
8 impact of the program.

9 I'd like to introduce you to
10 Mrs. Olga Hernandez and her family, Pablo, Allen,
11 and Sabrina. We've all come down from San Francisco
12 Bay Area.

13 Because Mrs. Hernandez speaks
14 Spanish, I would like to introduce Mrs. Sandra
15 Alvarez, who is one of our program staff, to
16 translate the Spanish. So first we'll have Sandra.

17 MS. ALVAREZ: Thank you. My name is Sandra
18 Alvarez. I'm a nutritionist and work for the UC
19 Cooperative Extension. I work for San Francisco and
20 San Mateo Counties.

21 This is the family that I was able
22 to help -- one of the families that I've been able
23 to help. Each of us reach 100 families a year.

24 As an extension of the University,
25 we're like an arm of a body that can go out there

1 and reach those families that can benefit from our
2 program.

3 We have various ways to reach the
4 families. One of them is home study, in which we
5 contact the parents, the people, telephone, via
6 telephone and also by mail.

7 Another way we do it is through the
8 social workers. And they're the ones that see which
9 cases could benefit from us going directly to the
10 people's homes and teaching them about the
11 differences between -- A lot of people think Vitamin
12 C and calcium are the same thing because they see
13 the "C" on the box.

14 So we teach them what's a vitamin,
15 what's a mineral, the differences, where they can
16 find it, how is that important for us, why do we eat
17 these things, why is it essential, even to bother
18 buying those things or even reading the labels on
19 the boxes. All those things.

20 And besides that, we also help them
21 to better use their food stamp money so that it can
22 last them through the month, like tips, we get a lot
23 of information to them, plus recipes.

24 So this is Olga Hernandez. And I
25 would like her to tell you her story, and I will

1 translate for her.

2 MS. WATKINS: I don't know if the audience
3 can hear you so you may want to ask her --

4 MS. HERNANDEZ: (Through the interpreter)
5 She goes that her name, as you heard, is Olga
6 Hernandez; that her experience with me going to her
7 home was nice, because another social worker that
8 went before wasn't as nice, and that she has a very
9 loving family that helps her.

10 She works a little bit, but she
11 still has to take care of her children.

12 She says that with me going over
13 there she learned how to balance the food and the
14 importance of eating vegetables every day, how to
15 eat healthy with little bit of money.

16 I gave her telephones and referrals
17 to various programs in the city for her as well as
18 for her children.

19 And she also liked that I went --
20 The fact that I went to her house because with her
21 children, she couldn't go anywhere before. And she
22 also liked the fact that I speak her language. And
23 that all the program helped her and her family as
24 well; that now she has a better use for her food
25 stamps money.

1 MS. WATKINS: Thank you very much.

2 MS. JOY: Thank you, Mrs. Hernandez, for
3 your testimony on the impact of both food stamps and
4 FSNEP.

5 This success story is really
6 significant because it shows the benefits of these
7 programs as an investment in the future, especially
8 in terms of our children.

9 I would like to share a little bit
10 of our evaluation data. Each of the 40 FSNEP
11 programs, which is aggregated and documented in our
12 annual final report -- Some of the data has been
13 published -- last year, we served 8,124 families and
14 17,284 youths.

15 Of these, 20 percent were male,
16 80 percent female, 48 percent were Hispanic, 34
17 Caucasian, 10 percent were African-American,
18 4 percent native American and 4 percent Asian.

19 Program objectives and goals of the
20 program is to improve self-sufficiency, to improve
21 the diet for the entire family, to improve skills
22 and purchasing, meal planning, food safety, to
23 increase fruit and vegetable consumption and to
24 decrease fat consumption.

25 Last year's data shows that we had

1 an increase of 25 percent in meal planning skills,
2 33 percent in shopping skills, an increase of
3 25 percent in reducing fat food, and an increase in
4 30 percent food safety skills.

5 We also increased the diet
6 25 percent, increased the vegetable consumption,
7 20 percent fruit consumption, 17 percent increase in
8 the switch from whole milk to low fat milk, and a
9 decrease of 30 percent soft drinks. We also have
10 increased food knowledge and food safety skills.

11 In conclusion, while we ponder the
12 future of the Food Stamp Program, we should remember
13 that it was in 1969 that the White House Conference
14 on food nutrition and health was convened.

15 The idea of hunger, poverty and poor
16 health in America was seen as a national tragedy.
17 1969 was not that long ago.

18 The Food Stamp Program has made a
19 big difference in the lives of millions of Americans
20 and should continue to be there.

21 The FSNEP program is now a part of
22 this tradition and the literature shows quite
23 clearly that food stamps and education have a
24 synergistic effect.

25 I've done a number of research

1 studies that have documented this. One study that's
2 been published in 1998 was showing a videotape of
3 vegetable consumption to food stamp recipients
4 compared to roll group.

5 We had an increase of 1.21 servings
6 of vegetables in the experiment group, other cities
7 have also documented.

8 In 1999, we showed that the food
9 preparation skills, families that know how to cook
10 and prepare food from scratch, have better diets,
11 especially in terms of reduced fat and the
12 consumption of fruits and vegetables.

13 I've seen this demonstrated in my
14 work over the last 21 years. Helping families to
15 help themselves is the goal of our program.

16 Food stamp programs who learn skills
17 in food shopping, food preparation and nutrition,
18 food safety and knowledge use their food stamps more
19 wisely.

20 I'd like to end with a quote from an
21 interview I did with former Congressman Leon
22 Panetta. I did this interview in 1989 on the 20th
23 anniversary of FSNEP. At the time, he was chair of
24 the House Budget Committee.

25 He said, I am very optimistic. I

1 think there is a growing recognition that the
2 investment we make in programs like this saves us
3 tremendous funds. I think there's a recognition by
4 Congress. This is not just good for people in terms
5 of good nutrition. It is a good investment in the
6 future.

7 Thank you.

8 MS. WATKINS: Thank you. Gina Tucker.

9 MS. TUCKER: Good afternoon. My name is
10 Gina Tucker. I'm the FSNEP specialist for Solano
11 County Health and Social Services.

12 We'd like to make the following
13 changes or suggestions for changes:

14 We would like to exempt one vehicle
15 per working household member. We'd like to raise
16 the gross income from 130 percent of the poverty
17 level to 185 percent.

18 We would also like to change the
19 budget computation to look more like CalWORKS. We'd
20 like to change the standard shelter costs and income
21 level households. We'd like to use the same limits
22 as Medi-Cal.

23 We'd like to see the federal
24 eligibility reinstated for citizens. We'd like to
25 remove the work requirements for the ABAWDs, remove

1 the age restrictions for 22-year-olds that live with
2 their parents and reinstate benefits to convicted
3 drug felons.

4 We would also like to increase the
5 minimum allotment from \$10 to 30 for one-to-two
6 person households.

7 If perhaps the WIC program could
8 administer the Food Stamp Program and grant those
9 applications, we think that might be easier than
10 putting it at the welfare department.

11 They've been very successful with
12 nutrition education, and people are more receptive
13 with WIC than food stamp programs at the welfare
14 office.

15 And we would like to eliminate
16 monthly reporting and go to a change or quarterly
17 reporting system.

18 And basically we'd like to say that
19 the Food Stamp Program currently is very hard to
20 administer, confusing for the clients and the
21 caseworkers.

22 Thank you very much.

23 MS. WATKINS: Thank you. Linda Stone.

24 MS. STONE: Good afternoon. Hi, everybody.

25 Nice to see you. Welcome, Mr. Chandler.

1 I'm Linda Stone with the Children's
2 Alliance in Spokane, Washington. We're a statewide
3 children's advocacy organization that works on
4 public policy affecting kids and families.

5 I'm also the chair of the state
6 Antihunger Nutrition Coalition, and I'm also here
7 representing the Western Region Antihunger
8 Consortium. And you've already heard from some of
9 our members in California.

10 I wanted to start out with
11 reiterating something that you heard at the New York
12 session from Edie Messik (phonetically) which is the
13 top ten best things about the Food Stamp Program.

14 I thought even though you had heard
15 it, Allen probably hasn't, and people here may like
16 to hear it. So here's the top ten best things about
17 the Food Stamp Program:

18 Number 10, the Food Stamp Program
19 responds to economic change. Number 9, participants
20 can obtain the food of their choice. This is a
21 really critical piece.

22 Number 8, the Food Stamp Program is
23 efficient. Number 7, the Food Stamp Program helps
24 many segments of the community. It's not restricted
25 to a certain age group or a certain geographical

1 group.

2 The Food Stamp Program, number 6, is
3 a right, be it an entitlement. That's an important
4 piece. Number 5, the Food Stamp Program creates
5 self-sufficiency by reducing hunger and enabling
6 folks to succeed in the workplace.

7 Number 4, the Food Stamp Program is
8 good for families. It enables parents and
9 grandparents to care for children in the home,
10 permits families to live together, supports
11 children's economic insecurity.

12 Number 3, the Food Stamp Program
13 improves nutrition and health. Number 2, the Food
14 Stamp Program reduces hunger.

15 And Number 1, the Food Stamp Program
16 reflects a national commitment to end hunger and
17 food insecurity.

18 And that's an important national
19 commitment that we certainly want to sustain in the
20 future.

21 One of my other hats is to chair the
22 advisory committee to the Economic Services
23 Administration and the Department of Social and
24 Health Services in Washington.

25 And so with that hat on, I'm also

1 representing John Etherton, who is our acting
2 assistant secretary for Economic Services. And we
3 had a couple things that we both wanted to bring to
4 you.

5 One has to do with -- Well, both of
6 them really have to do with things you could do now
7 as well as through reauthorization.

8 The first is that there are -- I've
9 been reading in the paper that various federal
10 agencies are going on sort of administrative assault
11 in the last months of the Clinton administration.

12 And EPA and other national
13 departments are issuing regulations and sort of
14 taking the offensive around some issues. And we
15 would like to see a similar kind of aggressive
16 administrative approach to a set of issues in the
17 Food Stamp Program.

18 And this approach really started
19 last year, with President Clinton's announcement
20 around categorical eligibility and some other
21 things.

22 But the further things we would like
23 to see happen through immediate administrative
24 action are extending transitional benefits to
25 families leaving cash welfare.

1 This would be wonderful, to freeze
2 benefits for a period of time and acknowledge the
3 importance of the Food Stamp Program in that
4 transition; to expand the option of quarterly
5 reporting to all households; to give states options,
6 more flexible options around counting irregular
7 income, particularly child support income, so it
8 doesn't become a problem for both the family and the
9 administrators; and increase the disregard for
10 irregular income \$200.

11 And also make permanent the quality
12 control adjustments that happened last year, taking
13 into account immigrants and working families in the
14 food stamp caseload. So to continue that practice.

15 So that sort of leads into the
16 second set of things that John and I wanted to bring
17 to your attention that have to do with performance
18 measures for the Food Stamp Program.

19 And you've heard me whine and talk
20 about QC and error rates and performance standards a
21 lot.

22 I really feel that the aggressive
23 kinds of recommendations made to our state to reduce
24 our error rate, which we did, also greatly affected
25 participation. And people have already mentioned

1 three-month certification is a problem, excessive
2 verification.

3 It all gets back to the fact that
4 the program is judged on the basis of payment
5 accuracy alone.

6 So we would like to see additional
7 measures around participation, quality of service,
8 timeliness of issuance, outreach, nutrition,
9 education, as well as payment accuracy.

10 And I'm e-mailing you some written
11 testimony. It's a little chart that actually was
12 developed by John Shop, that we participated in
13 around these performance measures, and would
14 appreciate looking into that now and with
15 reauthorization.

16 In terms of reauthorization, most
17 things that I was going to talk about have been
18 discussed. I just have a couple things I want to
19 mention.

20 First of all, the Western Region
21 Antihunger Consortium has developed a draft, a
22 discussion paper on reauthorization that I will also
23 be e-mailing you. And we've circulated this both
24 through the western region USDA office, to the
25 western region state food stamp directors.

1 We are really concerned not to have
2 a situation where we have polarized state agencies
3 pushing one set of changes and advocates another.

4 We think we have a lot of common
5 ground around wanting to reduce complexity in the
6 program and increase access for folks.

7 So, as I think a lot of people have
8 said, the key issues in my mind are adequacy, access
9 and purpose.

10 Adequacy, I'm not going to spend too
11 much time talking about. It relates to things like
12 eligibility and benefits and minimum benefits,
13 although I did notice, Shirley, in your comments
14 that the average resource of a food stamp household
15 is \$118.

16 So why on earth do we spend the
17 papers, the verifications, the agony trying to
18 determine exactly how many pennies that family has
19 in the bank, or in their sock, for that matter.

20 So I think that basing food stamp
21 eligibility on income is the direction we need to go
22 in.

23 Around access, it's interesting
24 listening to what folks have said about the
25 important role of ACORN and the homeless coalition.

1 I think in our state we have fair
2 budget action campaign, welfare rights. My own
3 organization, the Children's Alliance, has done sort
4 of an interpretation of all the welfare and food
5 stamp rules and gotten those out to people.

6 There's a whole structure now of
7 folks who are in place because customer service
8 doesn't exist in a lot of our state offices and
9 because there are structural barriers that you have
10 to be super, super advocate to get by. And that's
11 really a shame.

12 We could be spending our resources
13 on other things if we didn't have to pass out
14 information and help educate and clarify rules for
15 people that should be the responsibility of our
16 states.

17 And I think that that's a role that
18 USDA can play in clarifying that responsibility.

19 Washington state actually has
20 convened a working group on customer services that
21 I'm very excited about, that's looking at everything
22 from the application to how long do people have to
23 wait, why don't your phone calls get returned, those
24 kinds of things. And I'm hoping it's going to have
25 an impact. But there should be a national focus on

1 that.

2 And finally, in the efforts of
3 number of states to conform the Food Stamp Program
4 to their TANF program, people have gotten the wrong
5 idea.

6 Food Stamp Program is not a work
7 program. Food Stamp Program is a nutrition program.

8 And when you begin to ask people,
9 like we ask ABAWDs, to work 16 to 20 hours a month
10 to get their food stamp allotment, it's a real
11 perversion of what the intent of the Food Stamp
12 Program is.

13 In my state, God bless them, you
14 know, we're now asking ABAWDs to look for work for
15 30 hours a week for two months.

16 Now, for some people, that may be
17 wonderful and they may find jobs, but for a lot of
18 people, who probably have significant barriers, that
19 is just another set of hoops to jump through in
20 preparation of getting a very small food stamp
21 allotment. The Food Stamp Program is a nutrition
22 program.

23 I just want to read one thing here.
24 I was asked to present some comments to you by one
25 of our large food distribution programs, Food

1 Lifeline, which is the second harvest food bank in
2 western Washington.

3 And the final comment that they had
4 I think says it pretty well. It's called remove
5 restrictions that are nonincome-based. Job status,
6 immigration status and other nonincome-based
7 restrictions bear little on whether or not a family
8 or individual can put food on the table. Hungry is
9 hungry.

10 The universal declaration of human
11 rights to which the nation is a signatory clearly
12 states food is a basic human right. It does not say
13 if they're employed or if they were born here. It
14 says food is a basic human right.

15 It appears current law violates this
16 international treaty. We hope the new law does not.

17 Thanks for the opportunity to speak,
18 and I'll be sending in some written comments.

19 MS. WATKINS: Thank you.

20 We have a caller on the line.

21 MR. PAUL: Hello, my name is John Paul,
22 calling from Marin County Health and Human Services.

23 MS. WATKINS: Go ahead, caller. This is
24 Shirley Watkins with USDA, and we're delighted that
25 you're on the phone.

1 MR. PAUL: Thanks very much. I just wanted
2 to make a few comments. I haven't heard any of the
3 previous speeches, but one of the things that I
4 would like to advocate for is some kind of a
5 regional shelter rate deduction.

6 In areas of the country where the
7 cost of living for a shelter are much higher, I
8 think that a higher standard deduction would be
9 beneficial as far as allowing people -- you know, as
10 far as realizing how much money is being spent on
11 shelter costs.

12 Another thing that we find is
13 that -- We do outreach to elderly folks. And the
14 minimum allotment that they are entitled to, \$10, in
15 a lot of cases, is not motivation enough for them to
16 come in to the office, to fill out the paperwork.

17 The cost of transportation to get
18 down to the office, in a lot of cases, almost eats
19 up the 10 bucks.

20 So if the minimum allotment could be
21 raised, that would be more motivation for our
22 elderly folks to come in and get food stamps.

23 And finally, I wanted to mention
24 that if we could take a look at going away from
25 monthly reporting to change reporting, as the

1 Medicaid programs are doing, that would ease
2 administration of the Food Stamp Program in terms of
3 allowing eligibility of workers to process cases
4 much more efficiently.

5 So those are just three comments
6 that I wanted to make to you as you're looking at
7 reauthorization.

8 MS. WATKINS: Thank you, John. I wonder if
9 you want to give us an amount. You said the \$10
10 minimum was not sufficient. Do you have an amount
11 that you would like to suggest?

12 MR. PAUL: Well, I think that at least \$50
13 would be an amount that would be helpful. That
14 would be motivation enough, I think, for a lot of
15 our elderly population to consider using the
16 program.

17 MS. WATKINS: Okay. Thank you.

18 MR. PAUL: And in terms of the cost of
19 food, I also think that that would be an amount that
20 would really make a difference towards their dietary
21 needs for them -- See, what we're finding, too, is
22 people are having to make a choice between --
23 especially the elderly, between getting
24 prescriptions and buying food. So one or the other.
25 The diet and the prescriptions aren't -- diet and

1 the medication, one of them is being sacrificed.

2 MS. WATKINS: Okay. Thank you very much,
3 and we appreciate you calling. You have a great
4 day.

5 MR. PAUL: Thanks for the opportunity.

6 MS. WATKINS: Okay. Bye.

7 MR. PAUL: Bye.

8 MS. WATKINS: Our next speaker, Tom
9 McLaughlin.

10 MR. McLAUGHLIN: My name is Tom McLaughlin,
11 and I am the Western Regional Director for Citicorps
12 Services government programs.

13 It's been very interesting sitting
14 and listening to many of the things we have today.

15 I've been fortunate to be involved
16 with Electronic Benefit Transfer since 1983 and
17 involved in a number of the programs.

18 And I think one of the things that's
19 illustrated today is that we probably haven't taken
20 enough time to look, not only at what was good and
21 bad in the program, but what we really need to
22 emphasize going forward.

23 I'll use a couple of examples, and
24 one of the earlier speakers commented on this in
25 terms of some of the difficulties. And I could

1 spend a lot of time on those, but I think there are
2 a couple things that are really important.

3 One of the things that we've found
4 across the country and across the projects is that
5 not only has Electronic Benefit Transfer benefited
6 the program participants with respect to access and
7 the ability to use a card, which perhaps they've
8 never had before, but it's also opened up a whole
9 new line of communication, which a lot of times
10 wasn't there previously.

11 Today Citicorps, from 1991 to the
12 present, has gone from taking no customer service
13 calls, with respect to balance inquiries and other
14 problems in getting benefits, to taking more than
15 11 million calls a month.

16 And the comments earlier about the
17 difficulties many times in reaching someone at a
18 local eligibility office or reaching someone who
19 could provide assistance, I think there's a real
20 message there.

21 The difficulty is that some of the
22 states are now looking at rebidding or reauthorizing
23 programs or considering cutting back on that service
24 because of the cost of the service. And I think
25 that would be unfortunate if that transpires.

1 It is perhaps, I think notable, that
2 the FNS has overseen in the past six, seven years
3 one of the real success stories around the country
4 with all of the vendors that work with us in terms
5 of automation of benefits. It's been a huge effort.

6 I was heard last Tuesday from one of
7 your representatives now that more than 80 percent
8 of the benefits distributed today are distributed
9 electronically.

10 It's also perhaps appropriate that
11 with California moving very shortly toward
12 Electronic Benefit Transfer, that this last session
13 in Los Angeles address some of these issues.

14 The task of bringing up Electronic
15 Benefit Transfer in California is both a daunting
16 and a challenging one, but it's also one that I
17 think a lot of folks are looking forward to.

18 A couple of the other areas that
19 were mentioned, though, I think are very important
20 as you look at reauthorization.

21 One of the things that, when the
22 program started out, there was a requirement that
23 it's not permissible, and there still is a
24 requirement that it's not permissible, for states to
25 pay more for an electronic program than for what

1 they were spending previously in their manual
2 distribution systems.

3 The so-called cost neutrality cap,
4 if you look at how the programs have come about, has
5 really become almost irrelevant, but it's also still
6 very problematic.

7 And it's irrelevant because the
8 services that are now provided by many states under
9 electronic benefit programs are services that really
10 weren't there. I mentioned customer service as one.
11 The services that really weren't there previously.

12 These are services that states have
13 stepped up to paying their half and now they're
14 facing, in some instances, difficulties with respect
15 to the cost caps.

16 Another area that was mentioned
17 earlier that we're very excited about are the
18 Farmers Markets.

19 And as I know you're well aware,
20 there are currently four pilot projects going in
21 Florida, New York, Hawaii and New Mexico, all a
22 little different, but two of which are wireless
23 projects that we think was mentioned.

24 They offer some real opportunity to
25 including a group of merchants that are very

1 difficult to service under an electronic program.

2 We're very excited about the ability to do that.

3 One other thing that I would mention
4 is the ease of use. You've heard today about
5 standing in lines to get a card -- or to get food
6 stamps and standing in lines to do eligibility.

7 We believe that there are real
8 opportunities in applying the technology that you've
9 approved and that we, among others, are putting out
10 there.

11 Audio response systems, voice
12 recognition systems that are now being used to
13 provide customer service can also be used to provide
14 on-line eligibility.

15 And there are a few states that are
16 beginning to look at this so that people don't have
17 to take off from work in order to go and recertify,
18 whether it's monthly or quarterly or whatever the
19 requirement is.

20 That technology is available today.
21 It's been tested. It can accommodate virtually any
22 language that's out there, and it's something that
23 we would hope would be looked at as we go forward.

24 The last area that I want to mention
25 as you look at reauthorization is that the majority

1 of electronic benefit legislation was that passed in
2 1992 or before.

3 There have been a few amendments
4 since then, but basically the legislation and the
5 regulation that came from that was 1992 variety.
6 And we were in a coupon world in those days, and
7 we're not in a coupon world anymore, and we haven't
8 been for some time.

9 But with the exception of the two
10 most recent changes in regulation around
11 interoperability and adjustments, I don't think
12 there have been any changes in the current
13 regulations at FNS since 1996.

14 I think that it would really behoove
15 the agency to take a very hard look at this, and
16 with your congressional support as you go into
17 reauthorization to address some of the issues that
18 are still paper-based when we're trying to do it
19 electronically.

20 The other item that I would mention
21 along this same line is that the effort is out there
22 and has been there from day one with FNS to
23 piggyback this on existing commercial systems.

24 And a comment was made earlier about
25 an opportunity to provide people the ability to move

1 into the mainstream as they're seeking employment.

2 This is something that, again, the
3 regulations don't always support. And I know we,
4 along with the folks at the national automated
5 clearinghouse who administer the national quest
6 rules and others, would be happy to work with you on
7 that.

8 The last thing that I would mention
9 is that for those who fear EBT in California, I'd
10 just mention one story that actually came from one
11 of the early projects in EBT, and that was in
12 Minnesota.

13 And Minnesota, early on, was one of
14 the leaders in this area and started the first cash
15 project. And they were using both automatic teller
16 machines and point of sale, as they later added food
17 stamps.

18 We were doing some of the training
19 there, and we actually had a number of the advocate
20 organizations providing the training and assisting
21 us. And we had a variety of languages represented.

22 One of the gentlemen who walked in
23 from one of the local banking institutions made the
24 comment something to the effect that there was no
25 way that the individuals who were being trained were

1 ever going to be able to use the technology.

2 One of the trainers turned around to
3 him and said it I think perhaps the best that I've
4 ever heard. She said, Let me tell you something
5 about this. She said, These are individuals who beg
6 rides or who wait for buses or who get to local
7 offices where they then fill out 2-, 5-, 10-, 20-,
8 30-page forms, which they then do month after month
9 in order to stay eligible.

10 And if you think that three or four
11 lines on a little blue screen is going to keep them
12 from accessing benefits, you're crazier than the
13 dickens. Well, she was right.

14 We look forward to working with the
15 State and with FNS and California in doing what we
16 can. Thank you.

17 MS. WATKINS: Thank you very much. At this
18 time I think we'd like to perhaps take a little
19 break.

20 Do we have a caller? Oh, we have a
21 caller on the line.

22 JUANITA: Yes, hi. This is Juanita.

23 MS. WATKINS: Juanita, this is Shirley
24 Watkins with USDA. We're delighted to have you
25 participating in our food stamp conversation.

1 JUANITA: Thank you. What I wanted to do
2 was just simply mention a couple things that came
3 across my desk.

4 I work for the Sacramento Children's
5 Home, but I deal with a lot of the elderly, senior
6 citizens, who are disabled or homebound, who have
7 difficulty getting food stamps based on their
8 income. Well, it's actually the fixed income that
9 they receive.

10 It also interferes because they have
11 to purchase prescriptions, meaning that once they
12 purchase prescriptions, they're not having enough
13 money to purchase the type of food that they would
14 need and aren't able to get food stamps because of
15 their income being so high, the fixed income. I'd
16 like that to be addressed as well.

17 And I think I heard the speaker
18 before then talking about the long lines. And we're
19 talking about people who are homebound, so we're not
20 necessarily able to get in line or have access to be
21 transported to wherever these lines are for the food
22 stamps, to obtain them.

23 And I just wanted to make those
24 statements.

25 MS. WATKINS: Thank you very much for

1 calling in. You have a great day.

2 JUANITA: Yes, thank you.

3 MS. WATKINS: I think we'll take a break

4 right now and then come back in about 10 minutes.

5 (Brief recess taken.)

6 MS. WATKINS: Mike Miller.

7 MR. MILLER: My name is Mike Miller, and

8 I'm from New York.

9 I don't actually receive food

10 stamps, but I have a couple members in my family

11 back home who you could say who receive food stamps

12 or have been receiving them.

13 And recently, you could say those

14 two family members have been cut down on stamps on

15 account of the fact that they work.

16 Even with their work, one of those

17 people anyway, or one of those family members, have

18 a difficult time at times making ends meet and

19 paying off their bills and stuff like that.

20 I'm speaking on behalf of them as

21 well as other people who are in need of food stamps

22 or other kind of welfare or help that they need even

23 when they're working and their pay isn't enough.

24 And it's very important that

25 everyone does make a living and survive. And I

1 think that the USDA Food Stamp Program is very
2 important.

3 Also, I guess, part of my statement,
4 since President Clinton was already mentioned a few
5 minutes ago, I guess in closing, I guess I'd like to
6 say that -- I don't know if this is on live camera
7 or is going to be live on TV or what, but I'm hoping
8 somehow it gets through to the President because as
9 I share with people -- a couple people anyway, in
10 the Hollywood CAN or the Hollywood -- or rather the
11 Los Angeles Community Action Network, which I'm also
12 volunteering in, I've submitted a couple letters to
13 the President offering him my support in different
14 matters, different issues in the country.

15 And my work with the L.A. CAN is
16 only the beginning. And I intend to put on as much
17 of an intention as I can to get the President -- or
18 should I say, to get his attention as far as seeing
19 that my point that it's very important that someone
20 like myself give him, you could say, a helping hand
21 at a point like this in certain situations like this
22 and other circumstances you could say.

23 And I guess that's all.

24 MS. WATKINS: Okay. Thank you very much.
25 Lynda Stansbury.

1 MS. STANSBURY: Good afternoon and thank
2 you for the opportunity to provide comments on the
3 Food Stamp Program.

4 I'm Linda Stansbury, Director of
5 Pacific Operations for the Food Marketing Institute.

6 The Food Marketing Institute is a
7 trade association representing over 1,500 food
8 retailer and wholesaler members.

9 FMI's domestic member companies
10 operate more than 21,000 retail food stores, with
11 combined annual sales of \$220 billion, which is more
12 than half of all the grocery store sales in the
13 United States.

14 FMI members operate the nation's
15 supermarkets, from the local independent grocer to
16 the largest national chains.

17 I'm sure that when you hear FMI, you
18 know that I'm hear to talk to you about the series
19 of national outages that have plagued the EBT
20 system: May 19th, June 12th and 13th, July 6th and
21 7th, August 11th, 16th and 17th.

22 These national outages brought all
23 EBT transactions to a screeching halt; thus
24 preventing many food stamp recipients from receiving
25 benefits guaranteed them by USDA.

1 While the industry has been assured
2 that these major disruptions have been addressed,
3 food stamp recipients and retail grocers across the
4 nation have received past assurances, yet outages
5 continue to occur.

6 Although the outages on the above
7 dates lasted for hours, you should know that even
8 one time, a one-minute national outage makes
9 hundreds of transactions affected.

10 When the system goes down,
11 recipients and grocery retailers must suffer the
12 inconvenience and slowness of the manual transaction
13 process.

14 The frequency of these outages,
15 coupled with the cumbersome manual voucher process,
16 is having a negative impact to the front ends of our
17 retailers' stores.

18 When outages occur, retailers should
19 be able to place a toll-free call to the Automated
20 Response Unit, ARU.

21 The ARU should accept the call and,
22 through an automated process, authorize EBT
23 transactions over the phone as an alternative to
24 authorization through the retailer's point of sale
25 device. This is also known as voice authorization.

1 As you can imagine, when the EBT
2 system is down in over 30 states for a period of
3 many hours, a lot of retailers are going to be
4 calling the Automated Response Unit.

5 The fact that this line was
6 constantly busy in each outage exacerbated the
7 problem.

8 Another problem that occurs during
9 these outages are time-out reversals. This is a
10 technical term that means that even though EBT
11 transactions are declined at the store's checkout,
12 the recipients account may be charged still because
13 the transactions could have been in flight at the
14 time of the outage.

15 When a time-out reversal happens, an
16 adjustment must be made to the recipient's account.

17 Here again, the situation was
18 exacerbated by the slowness of the adjustment
19 correction process because of the large numbers
20 involved in these and previous incidents.

21 Some of my retailers have told me
22 that adjustments for some clients took as long as
23 three weeks. That means three weeks without food
24 money for recipients.

25 The bottom line is, EBT recipients

1 are leaving stores without food because of constant
2 system outages.

3 When the system goes down,
4 recipients must leave the store without food because
5 during these national outages, the voice
6 authorization number is constantly busy. And the
7 store clerks are not able to get through to verbally
8 process those transactions.

9 I understand that an attempt to fix
10 this situation took place on August 20th.

11 I'm hoping for the best, but please
12 recognize that food stamp recipients and retailers
13 have been dealing with outages since May.

14 I'm asking USDA to ensure that a fix
15 has been accomplished so that food retailers can
16 give EBT recipients the same service that is
17 afforded nonfood stamp customers.

18 Thank you.

19 MS. WATKINS: Thank you. Christine Jones.

20 MS. JONES: Hi, my name is Christine Jones,
21 and I'm a member of ACORN and -- Well, I'm on AFDC.
22 I receive food stamps, but I do an on-the-job
23 training program through the housing authority, so I
24 do that program through ACORN.

25 So we do have an --

1 MS. WATKINS: Do you want to speak into the
2 mike --

3 MS. JONES: -- advocacy line.

4 MS. WATKINS: -- so we can hear you.

5 MS. JONES: We have an advocacy line where
6 recipients call in when they have case complaints,
7 whether it's food stamps or their CA-7 hasn't been
8 turned in or whatever problem there is they have.

9 We handle like over 200 cases. But
10 75 percent of those cases are related to food
11 stamps, them not getting their food stamps.

12 But I just want to tell you about
13 this one lady. She's about 18 years old. She has
14 one child. Her mother is currently on AFDC.

15 After she had her child, she wasn't
16 able to open up -- She was able to open up an AFDC
17 case, but that was just for cash. She couldn't get
18 AFDC for herself and food stamps for herself and
19 food stamps for her child. She could only just
20 receive 310 a month. That was it.

21 And I just feel that it's not fair
22 for her, it's not fair for me, it's not fair for all
23 of us recipients to have to go through things like
24 that.

25 From my case, I was pregnant when I

1 started working. And I went in to report that I had
2 my daughter. I know she's not able to be added on
3 to my cash benefits because of the new law they have
4 after '97.

5 But when I added her on, they cut my
6 food stamps; they cut my check. And the reason they
7 gave me is because I had another child. I accepted
8 it. I went on. I'm still working. I'm not going
9 to quit. I'm not going to let them drag me back
10 down or keep me down.

11 It feels like they have a weight on
12 me and they want to hold me in one position. And
13 it's not fair. It's not fair at all. You can't
14 feed your kids right. You can't do what you need to
15 do. You can't pay your bills. You can't pay your
16 rent. You have to do what you have to do.

17 And I think you guys really need to
18 look at everything and do it right. The EBT is
19 going to be messed up. That's all I have to say.

20 MS. WATKINS: Thank you. Paula Chavez.

21 MS. CHAVEZ: Hello. I'm Paula Chavez, and
22 I'm with CAPECO, the Community Action Program of
23 East Central Oregon.

24 We service Umatilla, Morrow, Wheeler
25 and Gilliam Counties, which covers probably about a

1 ten -- Well, I won't get into that because I'm not
2 going to be accurate. It's a four-county service
3 delivery area.

4 And what I would like to do to start
5 off is I'd like to tell you about a story about a
6 girl I met on Monday. Her name was Lisa. And she
7 had applied through -- She applied for rental
8 assistance through one of our other programs.

9 And part of my job is that I had to
10 go to her home and make sure that she was in a safe
11 and habitable unit before we would help her.

12 And part of that inspection is that
13 I had to look in the refrigerator to make sure it
14 was cool enough for her, that it was keeping food at
15 a reasonable temperature.

16 And when I opened the refrigerator,
17 there was no food. None. There was some ketchup
18 and some mayonnaise.

19 Normally I don't comment on what the
20 clients have in their refrigerator, but I turned to
21 her and I said, My God, you don't have any food.

22 And she says, Well, I have some
23 things in the cupboard. I have some Top Ramen and
24 Macaroni and Cheese. I said, Well, why don't you
25 have any food.

1 And she said, Well -- And she picked
2 up this application on the counter, and she said, I
3 applied for food stamps, or attempted to apply for
4 food stamps last Thursday.

5 And she said, I work Thursday
6 through Saturday -- Excuse me -- Thursday through
7 Sunday, four 10-hour days, at the Wal-Mart
8 Distribution Center in Hermiston, which is about
9 40 miles away.

10 She said, I took time off from work.
11 I had to be there at 7 o'clock in the morning to
12 apply. And she said, I got there and the AFS worker
13 was sick, so they told me I could wait for a couple
14 hours to see if another AFS worker from another
15 office would come in to see the client, the clients
16 that day.

17 So instead of doing that, she said
18 that she would wait and apply on Monday, instead of
19 losing any more time at work.

20 She went back on Monday, and they
21 gave her an entire list of things that she had to
22 provide them, which include employment verification.
23 This entire time she's without food.

24 She has to get, of course, something
25 from her employer. That means a trip to Hermiston,

1 another 40-mile trip, because she wasn't planning on
2 going to work until Thursday.

3 She decided that she better not do
4 that because she didn't really have the gas money.
5 So her and her son, her eight-year-old son, were
6 eating Top Ramen and Macaroni and Cheese.

7 Now, I was appalled at it, and we
8 should be all appalled that somebody has to go that
9 long without accessing food stamps.

10 And she asked, Well, what should I
11 do until then. I said, Go to an emergency food
12 program, an emergency food box agency, which is
13 another part of my job with the agency, is that I
14 make sure that there is food in the four counties to
15 service households such as this.

16 And although the families, the names
17 change, the issues around the food stamps doesn't.
18 And those issues are the same throughout the
19 counties. And the issues include access,
20 especially access for working families.

21 It's very difficult to access food
22 stamps when they say you have to be there at
23 7 o'clock, no late arrivals, and we don't really
24 care what your schedule is. You have to be there.

25 The application process is lengthy.

1 It is, many times, intimidataing. She was an
2 educated high school graduate, about two years of
3 college. And she said, Some of these questions I
4 didn't know how to answer. So it was intimidating
5 for her.

6 The waiting period, it's terrible to
7 have to go and just eat Top Ramen and Macaroni and
8 Cheese for a week. I can't imagine doing it. I
9 don't think anybody should have to.

10 The benefit level also is too low.
11 It doesn't meet the needs, the nutritional needs of
12 households. That needs to change.

13 Outreach services. The outreach
14 services for food stamps when there was a change in
15 the ABAWD, the Able-Bodied Adults Without
16 Dependents, when that rule was changed where people
17 could start getting food stamps, that outreach was
18 basically done, in our communities, through the
19 community action agency. We wanted to make sure our
20 clients knew about it.

21 There was very little information
22 out in the communities from USDA that there had been
23 an actual change. And it's not reaching the
24 underserved populations that it needs to.

25 I agree with many of the things that

1 have already been said, so I won't take up anymore
2 time.

3 But I just want to tell you that
4 food stamps should be the front line and the
5 strongest line of defense against hunger. And it's
6 not right now, not in rural Oregon. It's the
7 emergency food programs that are. And I'd like to
8 see that changed. So thank you for your time.

9 MS. WATKINS: Thank you. George
10 Manalo-LeClair. Please repeat your name.

11 MR. MANALO-LeCLAIR: Good afternoon. My
12 name is George Manalo-LeClair, and I'm with
13 California Food Policy Advocates.

14 We're going to submit some pretty
15 comprehensive written comments, so please don't try
16 to attribute any priority to the comments I will
17 make. I'm just trying to fill in some gaps and some
18 things you haven't heard.

19 In preparing my comments, I thought
20 the least effective thing I could do was throw out a
21 bunch of statistics, but I do want to paint a
22 picture using some numbers, but without statistics.

23 I also felt it would be important
24 for me to seize the occasion today to release some
25 data that California Food Policy Advocates has

1 recently gathered.

2 We have a report examining the
3 traits in food stamp participation here in
4 California. And it's pretty surprising what we
5 found. I'll give you the three key findings. I
6 think it's something that sort of goes against
7 popular belief.

8 What this study found is that the
9 percentage of people eligible for food stamps in
10 California has actually increased over the course of
11 the years we studied, '96, '97, '98, the years we
12 had data for.

13 So contrary to what people are
14 believing, that the good economy has meant that
15 fewer people are eligible for food stamps, here in
16 California that is not the case.

17 The percent of Californians has
18 slightly increased, the percent of Californians
19 eligible for food stamps. That is really
20 surprising.

21 As a second point, which is that the
22 income for people eligible for food stamps in
23 California has declined.

24 That really surprised us, because we
25 were also buying into the notion that the good

1 economy was helping some people so that they were
2 able to get more income, but they'd still need food
3 stamps and so their benefits would be lower and so
4 they were likely not participating because it wasn't
5 worth their while.

6 But what we found in this
7 population, in the food stamp eligibility
8 population, their incomes actually decreased by over
9 \$600.

10 So the last finding I do want to
11 share with you is that the overall participation
12 rate for California plummeted as well.

13 Historically, California has had
14 the lowest participation rate in the Continental
15 U.S. We were 57 percent, according to USDA's
16 numbers back in '94.

17 Right after welfare reform was
18 implemented here, it dropped to 48 percent. The
19 most recent number we have for the state of
20 California is 52 percent.

21 That is very discouraging. So we're
22 really only reaching half of the people who should
23 be getting food stamps in this state.

24 So rather than giving you anymore
25 stats, I do want to throw out some numbers, but they

1 aren't statistics. I'll start with the number 1.
2 One is the number of cars we feel should be exempted
3 from the Food Stamp Program.

4 Many people have already made this
5 point so I won't go into it in much detail, but we
6 feel people shouldn't have to choose between
7 reliable transportation and the food their family's
8 need.

9 Second number is the number 4. Four
10 is the maximum number of reports we feel a family
11 should have to file in order to get food stamps.
12 California still requires monthly reporting. It's a
13 tremendous burden on recipients and on
14 administrators.

15 Even though we know in California
16 that millionaires are being created daily in this
17 dot com-driven economy, the reality is, for most
18 low-income people, their incomes are not changing so
19 radically to warrant anything more than quarterly
20 reporting.

21 I'm going to skip some other numbers
22 here and go to something that hasn't been addressed
23 today, but I feel should be. It's the number zero.
24 Zero is the number of people who should be subject
25 to fingerimaging requirements.

1 Here in California, as of
2 August 1st, all adult members of food stamp
3 households are required to be fingerimaged.

4 Now, here's the problem. USDA, in
5 the western region, has been quite vocal about the
6 need to balance access and integrity. However, this
7 fingerimaging requirement greatly upsets that
8 balance.

9 And at the same time, USDA has been
10 calling on states to take steps to reshape the Food
11 Stamp Program so it is seen more as a health and
12 nutrition program and less as a welfare program.

13 We believe if fingerimaging
14 continues, we'll never be able to reshape the
15 program. It will continue to be seen as a welfare
16 program.

17 If there is one aspect of the
18 program we feel that demonstrates a lack of
19 commitment to access, it is the fingerimaging
20 requirements. It is costly. It is unjustified.

21 I think many of you may have seen
22 the New York Times article yesterday, front page,
23 questioning the cost-effectiveness and the
24 effectiveness of fingerimaging in New York State.

25 We believe it is in effect a

1 response to pretty much a nonexistent problem of
2 ultimately fraud.

3 So we feel that USDA's ambivalence
4 on fingerimaging will have significant consequences
5 beyond the ability to reshape the program.

6 We also think it's going to limit
7 the progressive ideas that USDA has been promoting,
8 like the outstationing of workers in the outreach
9 and immigrant communities, just because of the
10 intrusiveness of the requirement, the cost, but also
11 the shear weight of the equipment makes the kind of
12 outstationing you want nearly impossible.

13 We feel that it conflicts with many
14 stated objectives by USDA. And we urge you, if you
15 can't stop the requirement, which I know will be
16 difficult, at least stop its spread. Stop the
17 spread of the fingerimaging requirements to other
18 states, but also to other federal food programs.

19 We feel if USDA wants to reshape the
20 program it will never happen if it's allowed to
21 spread to other states and to other programs.

22 And while I didn't want to give some
23 statistics today, I did want to encourage USDA to
24 take a data-driven approach to reauthorization.

25 We feel like USDA should begin now

1 taking steps to generate good data to make the
2 policy decisions that will be needed for
3 reauthorization in 2002.

4 One of the first things we want USDA
5 to do is look at the food insecurity data to see
6 whether the 130 percent cutoff level for food stamps
7 has the ability to address food insecurity in this
8 country. That's one clear piece.

9 The second piece is a little bit
10 tougher and will require, I think, a lot more work
11 on USDA's part, but we encourage you to do it, would
12 be to develop some data profiles of recipients so we
13 can remove some of the complexity of the program
14 while still maintaining the goal of ensuring
15 benefits go to those who need them.

16 For example, it's already been
17 mentioned that food stamp recipients face resource
18 requirements. And USDA's own data shows that
19 75 percent of food stamps recipients have no
20 accountable resources. Stocks, bonds, personal
21 property and other resources have to be taken into
22 consideration and, thus, they add complexity to the
23 program.

24 But how many people with less than
25 \$2,000 in savings are likely to have stocks and

1 bonds and how many food stamp recipients are likely
2 to have them as well.

3 So we feel that using probabilities
4 and some profiles, some data profiles of recipients,
5 we might be able to conclude that several food stamp
6 requirements serve the same policy goal and thus can
7 be eliminated.

8 I'm going to stop here. There is
9 still much I want to tell you about how to reshape
10 the program to make it work for working families,
11 but I won't push my luck. Thank you.

12 MS. WATKINS: Thank you very much. Leila
13 Towry.

14 MS. TOWRY: Good afternoon. Thank you for
15 creating the opportunity for members of the
16 community to address concerns and praises regarding
17 the national Food Stamp Program.

18 This dialogue should lead --

19 MS. WATKINS: Would you state your name.

20 MS. TOWRY: Leila Towry. Excuse me. It's
21 Leila Towry.

22 I'm addressing you today as a
23 representative of the community food security
24 project of Occidental College.

25 The community food security project

1 works to increase access to nutritious, culturally
2 appropriate food in low-income communities and to
3 increase the viability of family scale sustainable
4 agriculture.

5 Our programs include local, state
6 and national farm-to-school programs working with
7 after-school programs to develop nutrition
8 education, healthy snack programs and project grow,
9 gardening for respect, opportunity and wellness
10 through which women and children in domestic
11 violence programs learn about nutrition, cooking and
12 growing their own food, as well as developing job
13 skills related to food, nutrition and horticulture.

14 We have worked with the Santa
15 Monica/ Malibu Unified School District and the L.A.
16 Unified School District to develop the Farmers
17 Market salad bar program, which provides children
18 receiving free or reduced meals with healthy
19 choices, including a variety of fruits and
20 vegetables grown by regional family farmers.

21 The program is funded in part
22 through the California Nutrition Network, which
23 receives its funding through the USDA food stamp
24 nutrition education funds that are matched with
25 money spent by other governmental entities.

1 Nutrition Network funding allows
2 students, parents, teachers, principals, cafeteria
3 staff, farmers and market managers to work together
4 to develop strategies to promote eating more fruits
5 and vegetables in low-income schools where children
6 begin to form lifelong eating patterns.

7 The Farmers Market salad bar program
8 is, thus, a good example of how food stamp nutrition
9 education funds are spent to develop healthy school
10 environments where low-income students and their
11 parents can learn to make healthy choices.
12 Meanwhile, small farmers and other USDA constituency
13 groups are supported.

14 Food stamps are one of the most
15 critical components of the food security safety net.
16 Low-income people must have access to an adequate
17 amount of food stamps so that they can provide
18 nutritious food to their families.

19 Food stamps must be available
20 through a multitude of channels and outreach should
21 be conducted so that eligible people can easily
22 participate.

23 Schools, parks, and a variety of
24 community sites should be able to assist people to
25 apply for food stamps.

1 A nutritious diet is an important
2 part of staying healthy and enabling people to
3 continuing working, caring for their children and/or
4 going to school.

5 People in low-income communities are
6 bombarded with advertising of unhealthy foods.

7 In one South Central L.A.
8 neighborhood, the Community Coalition for Substance
9 Abuse Prevention and Treatment found more than 50
10 fast-food restaurants and no healthy food outlets.

11 This group is now working to
12 increase access to healthy food in their
13 neighborhood, along with nutrition education. Thus,
14 the USDA must help ensure that food stamp recipients
15 receive nutrition education that will enable them to
16 make healthy choices while helping to increase
17 access to healthy food in communities with a large
18 percentage of food stamp eligible people.

19 Nutrition education cannot be
20 conducted separate from increasing access to healthy
21 foods. Choices are influenced by availability.

22 A recent study conducted by the UCLA
23 School of Public Health indicates that around
24 40 percent of low-income students in the L.A.
25 Unified School District are overweight or obese

1 through a combination of poor diet and lack of
2 physical activity.

3 Through the Farmers Market salad
4 bar, these low-income students are learning basic
5 nutrition principles, making healthy choices in
6 their school cafeteria, learning how to grow their
7 own fruits and vegetables in a school garden, and
8 exploring the origins of their food by visiting
9 local family farms.

10 The sight of a child from the inner
11 city harvesting carrots out of the ground leaves no
12 doubt in my mind that this child will forever be
13 encouraged to consume wholesome food. They have
14 connected to what was, prior to this experience, a
15 foreign concept in their minds.

16 In order to provide for a continuity
17 of change, we must also determine what adverse
18 influences exist in communities.

19 It is not enough to open the
20 pathways and steer folks towards more healthy
21 choices when marketing strategies seek to hook
22 youngsters and their families on Taco Bell and Kraft
23 Macaroni and Cheese.

24 A positive new direction might
25 include policies that require or encourage

1 businesses in low-income communities to promote
2 healthy foods through marketing and access to foods
3 with whole grains, fruits, vegetables, legumes and
4 other high-nutritional value foods.

5 In a time when the health
6 consequences of obesity and overweight threaten the
7 well-being of low-income children and adults across
8 America, USDA must act to turn the tide towards the
9 promotion and increased access of nutritious foods.

10 In California, many of the programs
11 of the Nutrition Network are helping to do just
12 that.

13 Teaching women in battered women
14 shelters how to stretch their food dollars by
15 growing their own fruits and vegetables and cooking
16 nutritious meals and providing access to farm-direct
17 fruits and vegetables and education in low-income
18 schools and after-school programs are just a few
19 examples.

20 Current USDA guidelines do not allow
21 many gardening supplies to be funded through the
22 food stamp nutrition education program.

23 We urge you to remove these barriers
24 and allow nutrition education funds to be used for
25 gardening.

1 I'm almost done.

2 Numerous studies have shown that
3 gardening, whether in a school or community garden,
4 makes people more likely to consume fruits or
5 vegetables.

6 Thus, programs that make gardens the
7 place where nutrition education occurs should be
8 allowed to include costs associated with the
9 development and maintenance of those food gardens
10 and grants funded through the USDA Food Stamp
11 Nutrition Education Program.

12 The garden is an outdoor classroom
13 and, thus, the cost of materials and supplies for
14 the upkeep of the garden should be allowed just as
15 the cost of pencils and computers are allowed for
16 use inside buildings.

17 On another note, we want to also
18 strongly encourage you to enact policies that
19 encourage and facilitate school district purchases
20 from local small Farmers.

21 We applaud your development of the
22 USDA small farm school meals initiative, but have
23 found that many school districts require additional
24 allowances to carry out these programs.

25 One suggestion is that the USDA

1 request that states allow school districts that are
2 piloting farm-to-school programs for the national
3 school lunch, breakfast or snack programs to include
4 local and small farm factors in their bidding
5 requirements.

6 We urge you to renew funding for
7 innovative nutrition education programs for food
8 stamp eligible families.

9 It will be continually important to
10 provide funding assistance for those school
11 districts, local and state government agencies, and
12 community organizations who must take proactive
13 measures towards improving access to healthy foods,
14 nutrition education, use of school kitchens as
15 community spaces, school gardening and enrollment as
16 food stamp providers as a part of their scope of
17 work.

18 If you would like any further
19 information, please feel free to contact us. Thank
20 you.

21 MS. WATKINS: Thank you. Autumn Arnold.

22 MS. ARNOLD: Hi, there. My name is Autumn
23 Arnold. I'm here on behalf of the San Francisco
24 Food Bank.

25 I'd like to start out by briefly

1 sharing some of our experiences in the past couple
2 of years surrounding our role as the food bank
3 within the San Francisco community.

4 I'm sure it comes as no surprise to
5 you that in one of the wealthiest communities in
6 California and in the United States, we are seeing
7 an increased demand for charitable food assistance.

8 In the past year and a half or so,
9 we've opened approximately 17 weekly food pantries.
10 And unfortunately, the story of each one is pretty
11 similar. We open up a pantry. It's a weekly
12 distribution of groceries. If not on the very first
13 distribution, then one of the subsequent
14 distributions, we're at capacity or beyond capacity.

15 And that happens in every single
16 neighborhood in San Francisco. It happens in the
17 Sunset, in Richmond, in the Mission district, in bay
18 view Hunters Point.

19 There doesn't seem to be a big
20 difference based on neighborhood whether or not
21 there's any outward sign of need. People are not
22 getting enough food through the avenues that they
23 need to access that food.

24 It's also not a surprise that most
25 of that problem comes from high housing costs and

1 high costs of living.

2 And I'll echo the comments of the
3 caller from Marin County in saying that we're
4 finding that people in San Francisco are having to
5 make some very difficult choices between having
6 decent, safe housing and having enough food.

7 In some cases, they're making
8 choices between having housing period and having any
9 food.

10 Because of that, I'd like to make
11 some recommendations about the Food Stamp Program.

12 Within the program and within the
13 current eligibility requirements that are national
14 in scope, we're finding that the eligibility creates
15 a Catch-22 for families who are trying to afford
16 housing.

17 In San Francisco, the fair market
18 rent for one bedroom apartment is \$1,600 a month.
19 And so if you're a family of three making slightly
20 more than that, chances are you're not going to be
21 eligible for food stamps.

22 So although we do recommend aligning
23 food stamps with WIC, aligning the eligibility at
24 185 percent of poverty, of the federal poverty line,
25 we also believe that it's really important to

1 examine indexing on a regional basis either the
2 shelter deduction or just the benefit and
3 eligibility levels period.

4 I think that's an extremely
5 important condition, you know, if people in
6 communities where there is a high cost of living are
7 going to be able to access the food that they need.

8 You know, should the Food Stamp
9 Program be solely responsible for high cost of
10 living in places like San Francisco, no. But it is
11 important for people to have those benefits in order
12 to live healthy and productive lives. I strongly
13 encourage you to do that.

14 I would also like to let you know
15 that we think it's important for the Food Stamp
16 Program to follow the examples set at some food
17 providers and food banks throughout the country in
18 making access to food much more hassle-free.

19 I won't go into all the details.
20 You've heard a lot of those. But we've had a lot of
21 success in providing food to people at times that
22 are convenient for them, at places within their
23 neighborhood, in a way that doesn't involve a lot of
24 paperwork, that doesn't involve resource tests.

25 That is how it's worked for us. And

1 we really think that that model can work for the
2 Food Stamp Program as well.

3 Just a couple of notes on that. We
4 have found that in legal immigrant -- or in
5 immigrant communities, we have only had success in
6 providing free food when we have been able to go to
7 the community agencies serving those specific
8 populations and worked with them to get into the
9 community.

10 And I think that that's an important
11 model for USDA to follow, that only by really
12 sharing your resources with already established
13 community agencies will you be able to truly reach
14 people who may have misperceptions about the
15 program, who may have fears about their immigration
16 status.

17 If you're going to reach those
18 folks, it's really important to work with agencies
19 that are already reaching them. And certainly
20 removing restrictions on legal immigrants'
21 eligibility is an important step too.

22 I'd like to conclude by inviting you
23 to work with food banks and local emergency food
24 providers as partners in doing outreach, in
25 providing applications.

1 If people are coming to an emergency
2 food provider for food, they should also be
3 connecting with the Food Stamp Program at that
4 point, because they have demonstrated their need for
5 food already.

6 And so although we certainly don't
7 consider it our job to be doing outreach and to be
8 doing the functions of casework, we do want to have
9 you consider us to be strong partners in that
10 process and make it possible for people to access
11 both at one time.

12 So thank you very much. I
13 appreciate it.

14 MS. WATKINS: Thank you. Nancy Hernandez.

15 MS. HERNANDEZ: Good afternoon. Thank you
16 for letting us be able to speak out our opinions and
17 voice out whatever we feel is needed.

18 First of all, I'm with ACORN. My
19 name is Nancy Hernandez, and I'm with the
20 Association of Community Organizations for Reform
21 Now.

22 Earlier I heard a few testimonies
23 from general relief participants, and I don't know
24 if there was any TANF, but I deal with case
25 complaints seven hours a day, Monday through Friday.

1 This right here is just a portion of
2 case complaints that I handle (indicating). We
3 handle about 250 within a month. About 50 percent
4 of those are food stamp-related problems.

5 I'll briefly just tell you a few of
6 cases like, such as, it hurts me when a person that
7 is diabetic or that a health problems calls in and
8 says, I didn't get my food stamps this month.
9 They're claiming that they lost my CA-7. They're
10 claiming they don't have my fingerprints.

11 And when I end up calling, it's just
12 a problem that happened -- It's DPSS that misplaced
13 the monthly CA-7 report or, you know, just
14 fingerprints that were misplaced.

15 And the participant that is a
16 diabetic that needs special foods is suffering, you
17 know, until they do get those food stamps. And they
18 can't eat right because they are on special diets.
19 That's just one of them.

20 Another thing that there's problems
21 with is language barrier. I have a lot of
22 participants that call in that say, you know, I
23 believe I'm eligible for food stamps and they're not
24 giving them to me. Why.

25 When it comes down to it, they have

1 an English-speaking worker, where there's a big
2 language barrier, where the participant is not able
3 to recognize what they are eligible for. So we land
4 up, you know, solving a lot of those case
5 complaints.

6 Some that have happened is, now that
7 they're doing the home visits with the TANF
8 recipients, I had one caller call in, she said, You
9 know what, they denied my case.

10 She's like a family of four children
11 and just her as a single parent. Denied her case
12 because they saw men's clothing in the house, shoes,
13 pants, which belong to her older son.

14 We had to, you know, fight for her
15 in order to get her benefits, which she was entitled
16 to. She was a single parent.

17 They had fraud go out. They had all
18 kinds of investigators investigating, thinking that
19 her husband was living there with her. But actually
20 it was just her older son that wore clothing of an
21 adult. Kids nowadays are big.

22 So, you know, those are some of the
23 problems that I face on a daily basis. So I think,
24 you know, the Food Stamp Program is great. Thank
25 God for it, because there's a lot of people that are

1 in need.

2 I don't know about this EBT program
3 that's coming out. I mean, it seems good, but then
4 again, it seems bad.

5 When I was on food stamps, I used to
6 give my kids, you know, Here's a couple dollars, go
7 to the store, get whatever you want. Ice cream man
8 passes by. Mom, can I have a food stamp. All
9 right, here.

10 See, with this program, they're not
11 going to be able to have access to that. I mean,
12 which we can't even afford to really give our kids
13 food stamps for ice creams and stuff.

14 They should go for more important
15 things, but I think there's going to be a problem
16 with that.

17 If the computers breakdown, a lot of
18 people are going to be out there hungry, suffering.
19 People that are on medical, that have special diets
20 are also going to face it harder than just people
21 that are out there.

22 So I think they should really look
23 into that program to -- I mean, I know they're doing
24 it now in certain cities. Kind of study it. See if
25 it's really working and see if that's what would

1 work here in L.A.

2 I don't know, but that's just my
3 comment. Basically that's about it.

4 And we're here for people that need
5 help, you know. I do advocating all day, and I do
6 it Monday through Friday. So ACORN is here to help,
7 and we do have an 800 number if anybody wants to
8 write it down that's in the room. It's
9 1-800-324-3697.

10 So thank you very much for letting
11 me speak this afternoon.

12 MS. WATKINS: Thank you. Susan Chen.

13 MS. CHEN: Hi. Good afternoon. Thank you
14 very much for sitting in, listening to us today
15 with our suggestions.

16 My name is Susan Chen, and I work
17 with the California Food Policy Advocates. And
18 that's CFPA for short. I work to increase
19 participation in the Food Stamp Program in
20 California.

21 And recently I assisted a CFPA
22 research team in implementing a time motion study of
23 the food stamp application process from the food
24 stamp recipient's perspective.

25 And this study we just completed a

1 few weeks ago. It was done in four different
2 counties in California, which included Sacramento,
3 San Diego, Los Angeles and Santa Cruz Counties.

4 I believe this study will provide
5 useful data on the food stamp application process
6 because it will quantify, hopefully, the number of
7 hours that food stamp applicants spend in the
8 office, the number of trips that they make to the
9 office, and the amount of time spent doing other
10 activities in the office.

11 And by analyzing this data that we
12 collected in each of the offices and comparing the
13 practices of each office, we believe that perhaps we
14 could come up with a plan for simplifying the
15 process and something like that could be developed.

16 So CFPA encourages the USDA to make
17 similar time motion studies part of the current
18 access reviews which are occurring throughout the
19 country.

20 We believe that the time spent in
21 the office is a good measure of customer service.
22 And we also actually want to take the time spent in
23 the office one step further in translating it into
24 lost wages for the recipient, as other food stamp
25 recipients have told their stories earlier.

1 If we really want to reshape the
2 Food Stamp Program and make it work for working
3 people, I think it's really important to make the
4 link between the time that people have to spend in
5 the office and potential lost wages and
6 inconvenience for the clients.

7 While the analysis of the time
8 motion study will not be complete until October, I
9 do want to provide some preliminary and anecdotal
10 observations from the study.

11 On many occasions, I heard clients
12 comment about the difficulties that they experienced
13 in applying for food stamps while I was doing this
14 study.

15 They spoke of the long waiting times
16 that they had to spend in the office, offices, and
17 needing to make multiple visits over several-week
18 period.

19 And in some offices we observed
20 visits lasting over four hours in duration and
21 clients returning several, several times. And this
22 was not an unusual situation, but the norm in some
23 of the offices that we visited.

24 So as you can see, you can imagine
25 how hard it must be for anyone who's working to have

1 to ask their employer for four hours off on several
2 occasions to apply for food stamps.

3 So while we believe it's difficult
4 to legislate customer service, we believe standards
5 must be in place to guide the administration of the
6 Food Stamp Program.

7 And we also believe that there
8 should be incentives for good customer service. And
9 these must be established at the reauthorization.

10 So from what I observed in the
11 county offices, county food stamp workers try to do
12 their best to make sure that their food stamp cases
13 are error-free. And that makes sense, because the
14 federal government evaluates the success of counties
15 based only on the error rate in their food stamp
16 caseloads.

17 And it's no wonder that food stamp
18 workers must spend a lot of their attention and
19 focus a lot of their time on asking more and more
20 questions, not less questions, but more, and looking
21 at the details of every food stamp applicant's case
22 to make sure that there's no fraud occurring and
23 that there aren't any mistakes being made.

24 So in this scenario, more and more
25 paper evidence is better than less. And this is

1 even at the risk of inconveniencing the clients.

2 So we really believe that there's a
3 need for program evaluations based on more than just
4 the error rate, in addition to the error rate.

5 And we need measures which indicate
6 how well food stamp workers are doing in terms of
7 serving clients. And in addition to that, measures
8 about how counties and states are doing in terms of
9 reaching eligible people who -- people who are
10 eligible for food stamps, but not yet receiving
11 them.

12 So in the interest of time, I have
13 three suggestions: Number 1 is, states and counties
14 should be measured on the timely processing of
15 applications.

16 And while every county must process
17 an application within 30 days, we think that
18 counties that process applications faster and better
19 should be rewarded, meaning that they minimize the
20 number of trips and the amount of time that
21 potential applicants spend in the offices.

22 Number 2, we believe that there
23 should be progressive measures to improve customer
24 service, and things like that should be rewarded
25 again.

1 Steps that states and counties take
2 to improve access should not go unnoticed; and that
3 physical incentives to reward the outstationing of
4 workers in needed places in the community and the
5 establishment of nontraditional offices should be
6 established at reauthorization. Just increased
7 access for potential clients.

8 Number 3, counties and states should
9 be measured by their ability to reach all
10 eligible -- all of those who are eligible for food
11 stamps, because there are currently no incentives
12 for counties who take steps to get the over
13 1.8 million people who are eligible for food stamps,
14 but not receiving them, into the program.

15 We think that those counties that do
16 a good job should be rewarded in some way.

17 The food stamp participation rate is
18 a well-established measure and it should be used to
19 measure performance.

20 States and counties that increase
21 their participation rate should also receive
22 physical incentives and such measures would increase
23 the needed outreach on the program and would
24 stimulate efforts to improve access.

25 This measure should be utilized and

1 established at reauthorization as well, we believe.

2 And there were a few other comments.

3 Because I had the opportunity to spend so much time
4 in the food stamp offices, there was one thing also
5 that I noticed that lot of clients seem to have
6 problems in understanding some of the notices and
7 letters that they receive from the food stamp
8 offices, in particular the clients who spoke other
9 languages other than English.

10 And I think it's just very important
11 that there be evaluations done to ensure that all
12 letters and notices sent to clients that really
13 affect their cases, that they be evaluated to make
14 sure that people can understand them, and that
15 services in the future be provided in very
16 culturally sensitive and linguistically sensitive
17 ways.

18 I think I'll end right now. And I
19 want to thank you for the opportunity to speak.

20 And I understand that a lot of these
21 things, it's very, perhaps, difficult for the
22 federal government.

23 You all have limited ways to improve
24 access and customer service in the Food Stamp
25 Program, but I think there are steps that can be

1 done and very, very important things to do.

2 And the most important is changing
3 how food stamp performance is measured. And in that
4 way, that can affect how different counties respond
5 and are able to evaluate their programs in the
6 future. So thank you.

7 MS. WATKINS: Thank you. Alden Moore.

8 MR. MOORE: Good afternoon. I'm Alden
9 Moore. I'm a representative of the National
10 Homeless Plan, and I'm also a homeless individual
11 myself who, until April of this year, was receiving
12 food stamp benefits.

13 Part of the problems that I believe
14 have already been stated has been access to the food
15 stamp services themselves. Many food stamp
16 applications are processed in county offices here,
17 in particularly California. I'll just restrict my
18 comments to here.

19 And between lack of appropriate
20 services by the county personnel, poor attitudes, a
21 lot of dehumanizing treatment, that's why this room
22 is empty.

23 People don't believe that when they
24 have legitimate complaints, when they're having
25 legitimate problems, seeking food stamps and keeping

1 themselves healthy with appropriate food, that those
2 comments or complaints are going to be heard, much
3 less acted upon.

4 So you're having a very poor turnout
5 here, unfortunately, and I think that's one of the
6 reasons.

7 If you're going to review how the
8 Food Stamp Program is working, my experience here
9 this afternoon indicates most of this is based on an
10 individual's economy.

11 I've heard very little in terms of
12 what a human being actually needs to eat on a
13 day-to-day basis. I consider myself a healthy male.

14 Currently, the county guidelines
15 indicate that I should be able to feed myself on
16 approximately \$112 a month. I don't think that's
17 very realistic. That's one of the things that you
18 should look at.

19 Fraud and fraud considerations seem
20 to me to be the priority in the county offices. And
21 unfortunately, this is preventing a lot of people
22 who need these benefits, who need these services,
23 from being able to get them.

24 As has been indicated, you're
25 fingerprinted. You're required to show a number of

1 different kinds of identification. I don't have a
2 problem with this.

3 What I have a problem with is when
4 that administrative process slows down the delivery
5 of the benefits, prevents delivery of the benefits,
6 when paperwork can be misfiled, applications are
7 summarily denied, as mine was.

8 I was receiving both cash aid and
9 food stamp benefits. I received a notification for
10 an appointment three days after the appointment.
11 Both sets of aid were discontinued.

12 When I first applied, it was
13 indicated to me that my food stamp benefits could
14 not be canceled for those reasons. However, they
15 were, and I have not received them since April.

16 There was virtually no
17 accountability with the county services that deliver
18 the Food Stamp Program to the recipients in this
19 area.

20 People who are responsible for your
21 paperwork or responsible for errors in their
22 paperwork, responsible for allowing frauds into the
23 system, seem to be penalized for that.

24 But there's no balance to that
25 system if they fail to deliver benefits that are

1 needed by a family, by an individual, by a
2 community.

3 If they fail to meet those needs,
4 there's no accountability to the people who either
5 arbitrarily or by not providing proper information
6 or reviewing paperwork have forced people to starve.
7 And that's what we're having going on here.

8 When I was looking through the
9 guidelines that you've indicated here, it says that
10 the Food Stamp Program fights hunger and improves
11 nutrition among low-income households.

12 I'm afraid that because you're
13 working with the county offices, that's not
14 happening in my case, it's not happening in the case
15 of many other individuals.

16 I believe the USDA and FDA aren't
17 the source of the problem. The problem is a lot of
18 local distributors. But as I said before, I'm going
19 to restrict my comments purely to here in
20 California.

21 When you see increasing numbers in
22 needs, decreasing participation in a program,
23 increasing funds required for administration and,
24 yet, decreasing incidents of fraud within that
25 system, something is radically wrong.

1 And one of the things that many of
2 the participants that I'm personally familiar with
3 have told me about is they don't want to try for the
4 program. If I have no job, then I don't have to
5 worry about taking time off of a job to come and
6 apply for any benefits.

7 But at the same time, when I have to
8 fill out 18 pages worth of paperwork, that's a
9 little daunting. I happen to be lucky. I'm very
10 blessed. I'm very well-read, fairly well-educated.
11 18 pages isn't that much for me.

12 For a friend of mine who has a third
13 or fourth grade education, who might need it even
14 more than I do, that's not going to work out.

15 Streamline processing for the
16 administration is a very high recommendation amongst
17 the recipients.

18 Input on the part of the clients,
19 the recipients, the beneficiaries, whatever term you
20 want to put it to, there is no really effective
21 means for us to put our voices in. And that's why
22 also I want to thank you for this today. Thank you
23 very much, because we do have this.

24 At the county services, at the
25 distribution points, there's virtually none. I

1 think that needs to be reviewed.

2 The levels of benefits which you can
3 buy with that Food Stamp Program is very critical.

4 In international law today, food is
5 considered a right for human beings. However, here
6 in this country, that right is being denied.

7 Today I was going to go in an
8 attempt to get an application to re-apply. The
9 office states that it closes at 5:00. However, for
10 security reasons, they stop letting people in, I
11 believe, at 3:00, which means for two hours after the
12 county offices are supposed to be available for
13 people who at least start applications or get
14 information, they're not available. Not to any of
15 the participants, not to new participants, not to
16 people with problems.

17 Electronic benefit distribution
18 could be a source of great convenience and a great
19 fraud preventer.

20 However, as we've already stated in
21 the case with the county delivery, if you have no
22 accountability or if the people that you're
23 servicing don't have proper legal recourse or the
24 ability to address a problem immediately, it's kind
25 of hard to tell a mom and four kids, Well, as soon

1 as we fix the problem with the computers, you can
2 eat.

3 So a really streamlined manual
4 system. Additional lines or additional confirmation
5 lines for telephone verification would probably be
6 very beneficial to the system before you implemented
7 that.

8 My understanding, it's been
9 implemented in a lot of other states. This is a
10 high population state. Please do that before you do
11 that here, figure out a more streamlined manual
12 system.

13 And they are limited to the purchase
14 of food items -- Makes sense -- for families that
15 are living in homes. No problem again.

16 For people that are homeless
17 individuals like myself, who have no access to
18 cooking facilities, what you're doing effectively is
19 telling us that whatever benefits we may receive,
20 we're going to pretty much be forced eating
21 higher-priced foods, because they're preprepared,
22 prepackaged and frozen, or we're going to be forced
23 to eating out of cans.

24 If I go into a store that's a
25 legitimate vendor for food stamps and I attempt to

1 buy a frozen burrito, that I can do. If I attempt
2 to put it in a microwave, that I cannot do.

3 I don't believe that that was really
4 one of the original effects intended when this
5 program was designed and created to feed people.

6 When the rules and the safeguards
7 against fraudulent activity denies people who
8 legitimately need those services from getting those
9 services, you need to address how you deal with your
10 fraud, especially when fraud is so clearly on a
11 decline.

12 We've already mentioned
13 accountability.

14 I've never talked with anyone from
15 the United States Department of Agriculture or the
16 Food and Drug Administration or a suitable
17 representative thereof when I've ever had any
18 problems concerning the federal program that gives
19 me food at a county office.

20 No personnel from the federal
21 government or suitable representatives were there to
22 give me any additional information, for me to lodge
23 a complaint with, for me to try to get temporary
24 benefits to see me through a hard time because there
25 was an administrative foul-up or whatever. That's

1 something else that you may want to consider.

2 If the way a local administration
3 operates prevents the national system from
4 delivering food and benefits to people who need it
5 the most, you need to deal with that local
6 administration.

7 And up to now, I haven't seen
8 anything like that. I haven't even seen an effort.
9 I may not be correct, but this is based on my
10 personal experience.

11 When people are going back into the
12 work force here in California, the minute they hear
13 that you're receiving a paycheck of any kind at all,
14 you lose all benefits, even food stamps.

15 However, in your application and in
16 some of the information that is distributed at the
17 county office, it clearly says that you may have
18 your benefits continued uninterrupted, depending
19 upon the levels of your income, that you may receive
20 reduced benefits if your income -- if you're blessed
21 enough to get a job that's that good, or if you're
22 really earning good money, then you won't need it,
23 but there's no lead times.

24 In our current economy, many people
25 are paid biweekly or monthly. Well, if you are

1 supposed to be receiving stamps at the beginning of
2 the month, you get a job the week before you're
3 supposed to get your benefits, you won't get your
4 first paycheck until three weeks into the job, all
5 of a sudden you have nothing to survive on for the
6 next three weeks.

7 And this also pertains to food
8 stamps, which it's not supposed to, or at least not
9 in my understanding.

10 So I think those are all points that
11 really need to be addressed, the way you deal with
12 fraud, how fraud investigations are preventing
13 people from getting onto assistance they need, and
14 dealing with the local administrators that are
15 preventing this program from being as effective as
16 it could.

17 Thank you for your time.

18 MS. WATKINS: Thank you very much. Kate
19 Meiss.

20 MS. MEISS: Hi, my name is Kate Meiss, and
21 I work with Neighborhood Legal Services. We're a
22 legal aid organization that serves the northern part
23 of Los Angeles County.

24 First I want to thank you for
25 holding this forum today and allowing us the

1 opportunity to speak. And I also want to invite you
2 to come back, and I hope we see you again in the not
3 too distant future so this kind of dialogue can
4 continue.

5 I want to say initially that our
6 office supports many of the comments that have been
7 said here today, especially those that go to
8 preserving the food stamp entitlement, increasing
9 the auto resource limit, the simplification of the
10 application process, and the comments regarding
11 access and outreach.

12 In addition, we're also concerned
13 about the problems with the monthly reporting
14 system, or the CA-7, as it's called in California.

15 But I want to focus for a few
16 minutes on a slightly different issue, and that is
17 issues that are particular to the services that we
18 provide as advocates.

19 What my office does is similar to
20 what ACORN does. We represent individuals who have
21 been denied benefits, and we try to work and fight
22 with the county welfare department to get them
23 benefits.

24 But there are several barriers that
25 exist, in part because of the federal regulations,

1 that we'd like to see you address.

2 And the first area I want to talk
3 about is access to food stamp files. And what our
4 recommendation here is basically that the
5 regulations be updated to reflect current
6 technology.

7 And in particular, I'm referring to
8 the existence of copiers in food stamp offices and
9 the existence of fax machines in food stamp offices.

10 It's my understanding that the rules
11 were initially adopted before the existence or the
12 common practice of having copiers in offices. And
13 so, unfortunately, it's not clear from the
14 regulations that offices have to make copies of
15 welfare records available.

16 What is clear is that the file must
17 be made available and, as advocates, we're
18 constantly encountering problems, first with even
19 getting access to look at the file; second, some
20 offices make us come in, sit down and take notes on
21 the file. And then we end up having to fight with
22 them over what we can and can't copy from the file.

23 This wastes our time, but it also
24 wastes the welfare department's time because,
25 obviously, if somebody is arguing with me for

1 45 minutes -- This happened last week -- over what I
2 can copy, and then spending 40 minutes talking to
3 his superior about it, that's an hour and a half
4 that he's not helping somebody get on food stamp
5 benefits.

6 So our first recommendation is that
7 you clarify the regulations through some kind of
8 policy interpretation so it's clear that copies must
9 be available and made available at the request of
10 advocates.

11 The second issue relates to the
12 refusal to fax documents that are in the file to
13 advocates.

14 In Los Angeles County and throughout
15 the nation, I'm sure, many offices, food stamp
16 offices, are literally more than 50 miles from our
17 particular office.

18 For instance, if I'm going to help
19 somebody in our Lancaster office, it will take me
20 three to five hours to go up there, to review the
21 file, to get the copies made, and to return to my
22 office.

23 Obviously, a five-hour trip takes
24 away from the number of people that we can serve in
25 our office.

1 Some offices will send us faxes, but
2 most of the offices in L.A. County refuse to copy
3 even a single sheet and to fax it to us. So it
4 requires that someone from our office spend hours
5 going up there to get a document that we may need
6 for a hearing.

7 So our recommendation in this
8 respect is that you clarify the regulation again and
9 that you make it clear that faxed copies should be
10 sent to advocates.

11 And if you want to do that in a way
12 so that there's some kind of a limit in terms of the
13 number of miles someone's from an office, that's
14 fine. But that needs to be dealt with.

15 And I just want to add that this is
16 not peculiar to Los Angeles County. At a recent
17 meeting of Health -- a thing called the Health and
18 Welfare Task Force, which is a statewide group,
19 almost everybody in the room from throughout
20 California indicated that they experienced similar
21 problems.

22 The second advocacy issue I want to
23 talk about is not one that really impinges on me in
24 terms of my advocacy, but certainly harms my
25 clients. And that is significant delay in issuing

1 corrective underissuances.

2 What I mean by that is when we're
3 successful with the county, and we argue with them
4 and get them to admit that they've made a mistake,
5 our client is entitled to retroactive food stamps.
6 This can take weeks, sometimes months.

7 I had a case last week where it took
8 a year for those benefits to be sent to the
9 individual.

10 Today I talked to a woman who called
11 me who I helped in March, and when I ended the
12 conversation with the worker, she was entitled to
13 about \$800 worth of back food stamps that
14 represented about four months of underpayments.

15 We were told her benefits would be
16 on-line in two weeks. And she called me this week
17 to say that while her benefits have been restored
18 and she's been getting them since March, she's never
19 gotten paid for underissuances.

20 So our recommendation in this area
21 is that you adopt a deadline for processing
22 corrections of reissuances.

23 And as the gentleman and other folks
24 have indicated, that you adopt some kind of penalty
25 when the counties don't meet the deadlines.

1 Another issue I want to talk about
2 is an issue that's come up more and more in
3 California, and that is the treatment of state
4 work-study funds.

5 Under federal law, federal
6 work-study money is exempted as income, but state
7 work-study money is not unless it meets certain
8 criteria.

9 And as a result, individuals who are
10 students, who are going to school -- Most of my
11 clients are going to school -- to either learn a
12 trade or to get a better job so they can work their
13 way off of welfare, when they go to work in a
14 work-study job, they're finding their food stamp
15 benefits literally slashed. And they and their kids
16 are going hungry as a result.

17 And it makes no sense, because if it
18 were completely federal work-study money, you would
19 exempt it entirely, but because there's even 5, 10,
20 15 percent of state money in that, the state counts
21 the entire amount.

22 So our recommendation in this area
23 is that you change the legislation or the
24 regulations so that state work-study is also
25 excluded.

1 And I have written comments that
2 I've submitted that go into much greater detail on
3 this and cite the regulations that we're talking
4 about.

5 But I want to finish by talking
6 about two things that we had not written up in our
7 comments, but I just want to echo what's been said
8 here.

9 And the first is with respect to
10 this new policy in Los Angeles County which,
11 unfortunately, is likely to go countywide, but has
12 been an experiment, and that is this issue of home
13 visits.

14 I just want to make it very clear
15 this is where, when somebody applies for benefits,
16 whether it's CalWORKS or food stamps, a fraud
17 investigator goes out to the home to make sure that
18 they live where they say they live, and they'll
19 visit the family three times.

20 And if the family is not home, they
21 will deny them benefits. But they make no
22 accommodation for people who are working.

23 So if somebody has a job and they're
24 applying for food stamps and they're at work all
25 day, the worker goes out and leaves a card. And

1 oftentimes, a worker can't get into the complex,
2 can't get into the building, so they leave this
3 little business card on the side of a fence.

4 Obviously, a kid comes along, takes
5 the card, or it blows away, the person never knows
6 they were there. And as a result, we've seen
7 countless cases where individuals who are clearly
8 eligible for food stamps are being denied benefits
9 because they aren't home.

10 And by the way, the welfare office
11 refuses to make appointments for individuals who are
12 working.

13 It also significantly delays
14 expedited food stamps for those who are eligible for
15 expedited food stamps.

16 Finally, I just want to echo also
17 what's been said about the lack of bilingual workers
18 for individuals.

19 A particular problem in our service
20 area, which is the northern county, is the lack of
21 Russian speakers, Farsi speakers. There are some
22 Armenian, but in many of the offices there are not
23 Armenian speakers, and there's a large Armenian
24 population in that area. But it goes beyond
25 workers.

1 And in particular, there's a
2 tremendous problem in this county, in particular,
3 and I think in California as a whole, over the lack
4 of notices in other languages.

5 And in particular, not just notices
6 in other languages, but understandable notices in
7 other languages.

8 It's a particular problem right now
9 in Los Angeles County, because the county is
10 converting to a new computer system called LEADER.
11 And the LEADER system is simply incapable of
12 generating a notice in another language.

13 So my Spanish-speaking clients who
14 are in LEADER offices get food stamp notices. At
15 the top it says the name of the department and Food
16 Stamp Notice in Spanish, but everything else is in
17 English.

18 And this is a problem the county is
19 aware of, but to date has not corrected.

20 Thank you very much.

21 MS. WATKINS: Thank you. We have a caller.
22 Go ahead, caller.

23 TELEPHONE OPERATOR: Sorry, ma'am. The
24 caller has disconnected.

25 MS. WATKINS: All right. Thank you.

1 I'm going to ask that you limit your
2 remarks to 2 minutes and see if we can't get those
3 comments to us in writing.

4 I know you're like, I've been
5 sitting here waiting and I've got five minutes. And
6 we still have a lot of people who have signed up to
7 speak, and we want to be sure that we get everyone
8 in.

9 We'll be here until 7 o'clock to be
10 sure that we get everybody in.

11 Next speaker is Gary Swanson.

12 MR. SWANSON: I'm Gary Swanson. I am with
13 the Food Stamp Program in Sacramento, with the
14 California Department of Social Services.

15 And on behalf of our director, Rita
16 Saenz, I want to thank you for the opportunity to
17 provide input into this important process and to be
18 part of the food stamp reauthorization.

19 We will be submitting comments in
20 writing, so I'll be pointed in my comments at this
21 point.

22 Let me just mention that
23 conceptually we believe -- And I think this is
24 coming across today in the testimony that you've
25 heard -- that a broad overhaul of the program is

1 necessary.

2 And one of the areas that has been
3 mentioned that I would like to mention again is the
4 image of the Food Stamp Program. And maybe that's
5 one of its greatest drawbacks. Its perception as a
6 welfare program tends to stigmatize even the
7 neediest recipients.

8 Characterizing the program as food
9 security would go a long way toward increasing
10 participation of needy households, including working
11 families.

12 The administrative difficulty of the
13 program has been discussed. The program is
14 difficult for recipients to understand and abide by
15 the complex rules. This must be addressed, I think,
16 in reauthorization.

17 Simplification must occur in every
18 phase of the program; in particular, the eligibility
19 and benefit determination process needs to be
20 streamlined to reduce the administrative complexity.

21 And one of the areas that I'm most
22 concerned about, and it was discussed earlier and I
23 won't go into a lot of detail on, is that we need to
24 examine how we measure the program.

25 The program currently uses an

1 intensive process for determining payment accuracy
2 as part of the quality control. And we believe that
3 program integrity measures should be a component of
4 a successful performance, but there should be other
5 outcome measures as well.

6 At a minimum, outcome measures
7 should include a measurement of the effectiveness of
8 the program in serving low-income families.

9 There needs to be solid support for
10 the working poor in order to assist in their
11 transition from welfare to work in this regard.

12 We recommend raising the minimum
13 benefit levels for working families in tandem with
14 an automatic transitional period of eligibility. A
15 period that -- We're looking at a period of three to
16 six months.

17 In regard to the availability of the
18 program in providing assistance to needy families,
19 the issue of legal noncitizens has to be raised.

20 The states were left with the issue
21 of providing benefits for this population after
22 welfare reform legislation in 1996 changed the
23 requirements and a significant number of individuals
24 who met the previous requirements were denied
25 continued access to the program.

1 It's time to consider restoring
2 federal eligibility to all legal noncitizens.

3 And finally, we look at this as a
4 partnership. We look forward in working with you to
5 shape reauthorization. Thank you.

6 MS. WATKINS: Thank you. Charlotte Lee.

7 MS. LEE: Good afternoon. My name is
8 Charlotte Lee. I'm the Food Stamp Program director
9 for Los Angeles County Department of Public Social
10 Services.

11 And this is not my presentation
12 (indicating). This is the Food Stamp Act of 1977.
13 As of today, it's 118 pages long, grown from the
14 eight-page document that first came on the scene in
15 1964.

16 In 1964, eligible households were
17 defined in two short paragraphs. The first
18 paragraph limiting participation to those households
19 whose income is determined to be a substantially
20 limiting factor in the attainment of an
21 nutritionally adequate diet.

22 And the second paragraph allowing
23 each state agency to establish standards to
24 determine the eligibility of applicant households
25 with maximum income limitations and a limitation on

1 the resources to be allowed eligible households.

2 Over time, the definition of
3 "eligible households" has evolved from two
4 paragraphs to six pages, legislating all facets of
5 the acceptability of the source of income, income
6 limits, resources, resource limits and income
7 deductions.

8 The Act outlines in minute detail
9 how income, income deductions and household
10 resources are to be treated and calculated based on
11 the number of persons included, excluded and
12 disqualified.

13 While the goal of the Act providing
14 for improved levels of nutrition among low-income
15 households has remained unchanged, the Act itself
16 has grown ever more complex.

17 New regulations are added on an ever
18 increasing basis. Existing regulations are
19 constantly being reconfigured with exclusions and
20 inclusions.

21 As a result of these changes, the
22 Act has rendered the Food Stamp Program cumbersome
23 and complex to administer as well as confusing for
24 anyone interested in Food Stamp Program
25 participation.

1 The multitude of changes to the Act
2 has made administration of the program so complex
3 that the targeted population, especially the working
4 poor, in many cases, elect not to participate.

5 Jurisdictions with large culturally
6 diverse populations, such as Los Angeles County, New
7 York City and the state of Florida, find
8 administration of the Act particularly difficult.

9 Even though the program needs very
10 widely across the country, the same program
11 requirements apply in Harlem as in Casper, Wyoming.

12 The same methodology for measuring
13 program success is universally applied whether a
14 jurisdiction is serving ten participants and offers
15 no optional programs or serves hundreds of thousands
16 of participants with numerous optional programs.

17 The current system of measurement
18 does not accurately reflect whether or not a
19 jurisdiction is meeting the original goal of the
20 program to provide for improved levels of nutrition
21 among low-income households.

22 We believe the Food Stamp Program
23 requires a fundamental overhaul if it is to fulfill
24 its mission in the new century, and we have the
25 following recommendations for your consideration:

1 Eliminate the requirement for
2 face-to-face interviews of certification and
3 recertification and replace them with telephone
4 interviews. Develop a one-step benefit calculation
5 methodology.

6 Certify benefit amounts for six
7 months, or provide transitional food stamp benefits
8 similar to transitional Medi-Cal benefits.

9 Exempt one vehicle for every working
10 person in the household with a minimum of one per
11 household.

12 Eliminate the food stamp household
13 definition and use TANF definitions to determine
14 households instead.

15 Align requirements for all the food
16 stamp work programs. Restore federal eligibility to
17 all legal noncitizens.

18 And lastly, increase resource limit
19 to \$5,000 per household.

20 If adopted, these recommendations
21 would simplify the food stamp program and make it
22 more understandable, more available, and more useful
23 to the people it was intended to serve.

24 We strongly urge you to consider
25 them. Thank you.

1 MS. WATKINS: Thank you. Matt Sharp.

2 MR. SHARP: Good afternoon. Matt Sharp
3 with California Food Policy Advocates.

4 Just a couple brief points on the
5 Food Stamp Program and the possibility of converting
6 it to a nutrition insurance program.

7 Children need a consistent medical
8 provider, where they can receive immunizations,
9 regular preventative care, treatment for acute
10 illnesses.

11 Children without a regular provider
12 get sick more often as babies are less likely to
13 have immunizations and are less likely to get
14 treated for routine illnesses that can turn into
15 health problems.

16 Even children who seem healthy need
17 regular checkups. Someone needs to know if they can
18 hear properly, if they need glasses.

19 So in response to these concerns,
20 substantial public investments have gone into
21 expanding access and participation into the Medicaid
22 and SCHIP programs. Here in California, known as
23 Medi-Cal and Healthy Families respectively.

24 While these programs are still
25 woefully underutilized, with 2 million uninsured

1 children in California, it's a long uphill road to
2 make sure that every child has adequate health
3 insurance.

4 Significant commitments are underway
5 to both improve the access to these programs and
6 improve the participation in them.

7 These type of investments and
8 commitments are ones which I believe the Food Stamp
9 Program can draw very heavily and very strongly on.

10 With such evidence demonstrating the
11 consequences of hunger in our communities,
12 educational opportunities lost and squandered, and
13 the public health consequences of wide-spread hunger
14 and inadequate diets in many households, USDA could
15 build and should build on a few of the improvements
16 that have been done in health insurance, such as
17 express lane eligibility.

18 California recently established,
19 through legislation, a process by which a child's
20 eligibility for the Medi-Cal or Healthy Families
21 Program is automatically determined based on their
22 eligibility in a number of other programs that use
23 income tests.

24 This eliminates a lot of paperwork
25 and a lot of the stigma associated with the

1 application process that we've spent a significant
2 amount of the day listening to.

3 Express lane eligibility is
4 expected, through state budget projections, to
5 substantially increase participation in these
6 programs.

7 To simplify the reporting
8 procedures. Medi-Cal now in California has an
9 annual certification. These are state measures
10 taken in response to the significant concern about
11 uninsured children and the need to make these
12 programs easier to operate.

13 The number one reason someone in
14 California is terminated from the Food Stamp Program
15 is because they failed to turn in a monthly report.

16 That means families must go through
17 the process every month. It's burdensome for
18 counties in the state, and it's burdensome for
19 families whose income fluctuates.

20 In California, with substantial
21 numbers of migrant workers and a transient
22 population in both the cities and the rural areas,
23 monthly reporting to different offices is one of the
24 main reasons people drop off this vital nutrition
25 program.

1 This is an opportunity, through
2 reauthorization, to align food stamps with other
3 effective nutrition programs, such as WIC and these
4 health insurance programs, in both the way they
5 certify families and apply families, but as well as
6 the way in which they are marketed to the community.

7 California this coming year, through
8 a number of sources, is investing \$34 million in
9 outreach and marketing of the health insurance
10 programs available for children.

11 That's a substantial public
12 commitment which says clearly, on behalf of the
13 state of California, that these programs are
14 valuable and necessary for public health and for
15 children's growth and development.

16 The Food Stamp Program needs to make
17 similar substantial public commitments to both
18 improving the impression that the program is a
19 nutrition program and improving the visibility and
20 awareness of the program.

21 All throughout Los Angeles, in any
22 neighborhood you go to, you will see buses and
23 billboards and benches advertising places to sign up
24 for the Healthy Families or the Medi-Cal program,
25 800 numbers where an assister will come to your

1 house.

2 This is a substantial public
3 commitment because there is large political will to
4 make these programs widely utilized, and food stamps
5 needs to take some of those same measures.

6 Currently USDA matching funds for
7 state agencies encourage a number of useful
8 activities for outreach.

9 Many states, including this one,
10 have chosen not to use the federal match money
11 available, yet outreach is happening on food stamps
12 in a number of ways and means.

13 It could be more widely encouraged
14 through adopting some of the similar measures that
15 the health insurance outreach has, one of which is
16 an assister fee. Persons who enroll someone in the
17 health insurance program receive a small fee if that
18 enrollment is successful.

19 There's a strong incentive for
20 community organizations to play a very active role
21 in ensuring that all children have health insurance
22 in California.

23 Los Angeles County, about whom
24 you've heard many of the comments today regarding
25 the Food Stamp Program, has implemented a

1 wide-ranging Medi-Cal outreach project.

2 Over a targeted period of time, an
3 18-month period over the last couple of years, they
4 were able to enroll 112,000 children in Medi-Cal
5 during that time period.

6 It clearly demonstrates that through
7 a number of the access barriers being improved and a
8 number of the awareness issues being raised and the
9 visibility, increasing outstationing workers, all of
10 these things contributed to a substantial increase.

11 112,000 children is an enormous
12 number of kids who now have health insurance that
13 previously didn't because there was a clear
14 committed political will and objectives and funding
15 that followed in order to meet the goal of ensuring
16 that all the children have adequate health
17 insurance.

18 The Food Stamp Program can reach its
19 goal of providing nutrition insurance to all of
20 America's needy families and hungry families by
21 clearly committing to looking and replicating what's
22 best and what's already being done in some other
23 areas of public commitment.

24 So I encourage you to take a look at
25 some of these comments. Many of them will be

1 submitted to you in writing as well, and encourage
2 you to consider not starting from scratch, but
3 replicating some of the smart things already
4 happening for insurance in our communities.

5 Have a nice afternoon.

6 MS. WATKINS: Thank you. Sue Foerster.

7 MS. FOERSTER: Good afternoon. Welcome to
8 California. It's nice to stand up.

9 I'd like to focus on some of the
10 comments that haven't been made yet today.

11 I represent the Cancer Prevention
12 Nutrition section of the California Department of
13 Health Services.

14 And we are the ones who have the
15 privilege of administering the California Nutrition
16 Network for healthy, active families, which is sort
17 of part B of nutrition education with the California
18 Food Stamp Program, along with Amy Block Joy, who is
19 part A with FSNEP.

20 So we have twin programs in
21 California that are doing, on one hand, direct
22 services, and then social marketing is the part that
23 I'm involved with, which is mass media community
24 programs and policy change.

25 Through the network, we are working

1 with four other state agencies, social services,
2 food and agriculture extension, and the Department
3 of Education to try to harmonize what we are doing.

4 We are working with about 300 other
5 partners and able to fund about 100 local public
6 agents, primarily public agencies, so there is
7 gearing up to be a fairly good effort.

8 But what we're seeing, I wanted to
9 alert you, we are very concerned because the fruit
10 and vegetable consumption continues to be very low
11 in a state that produces over half of the fruits and
12 vegetables in the country.

13 We are getting some new numbers from
14 our 1999 state survey. And the survey actually does
15 reflect food stamp recipients as well as others in
16 the state.

17 And what we're seeing is that the
18 gap in fruit and vegetable consumption between
19 low-income and high-income people is widening.

20 We first saw that in '97, but we did
21 not yet attribute it to TANF, because we thought it
22 was too early. But now we are seeing the gap widen
23 significantly.

24 And in addition, we are seeing that
25 people we are reporting are doing without food.

1 We haven't been tracking these
2 numbers as long, but this sort of supports what
3 you've been hearing already, that we have this
4 widening gap between the very wealthy and the very
5 poor.

6 What we know is that when food
7 dollars are short, it's calories, rather than, say,
8 the healthier foods, the fruits, vegetables, whole
9 grains and legumes, and so forth, that go by the
10 wayside.

11 So one of the things that is very
12 important is trying to, I guess, walk the walk a
13 little more and figure out if there's some ways that
14 the Food Stamp Program, if it's to be a nutrition
15 program, can do more to sensitize the purchase of
16 healthy foods, both for consumers, but also for the
17 infrastructure in which food is sold and delivered
18 to communities.

19 My second point is that you've been
20 hearing a lot about restructuring the program for
21 the working poor, but I think a couple of other
22 specific points is that the benefit package based on
23 the Thrifty Food Plan is definitely too low for the
24 higher cost of healthier foods.

25 And it seems as though it really is

1 time to look at least at the low cost food plan. If
2 not some other configuration, a more updated way of
3 looking at how much it cost to eat healthy.

4 Similarly, you've already heard that
5 we have the lowest food stamp participation of the
6 lower 48 and that for us the eligibility limits are
7 too low. And so both the benefits need to go up and
8 the eligibility needs to go up.

9 You've heard about EBT. We are
10 concerned about the Farmers Market situation, and we
11 look forward to working with social services and our
12 health and welfare data center to resolve those
13 problems.

14 But we think more is going to be
15 needed to be sure that the automation is affordable
16 by not only Farmers Markets, but also probably the
17 small mom and pop stores, food co-ops and other
18 kinds of alternative marketing systems that provide
19 particularly fruits and vegetables at a low cost to
20 low-income people, but also helps support economic
21 development of small farmers and small
22 businesspeople.

23 The program also needs to continue
24 to have a good set of food security projects,
25 support for food banks, support for rescue programs,

1 to get California's agriculture abundance into the
2 food alternative charitable food delivery system and
3 also into schools and senior meal centers and so
4 forth, ways more than tax breaks for donations by
5 growers to be put into the charitable food system.

6 There needs to be strengthening of
7 local food system projects that assist small fruit
8 and vegetable farmers to develop alternative
9 marketing with a consolidation of the supermarket
10 industry.

11 More and more the small people are
12 being squeezed out, and that would include as well
13 southeast Asia and African-American and other
14 farmers, who grow on a small scale.

15 Another point is that I think it's
16 very important to create incentives. This would be
17 something new. Create incentives for nonprofit
18 service organizations to provide more food stamp or
19 nutrition education to low-income adults and
20 children.

21 And I guess I'll shift over a little
22 bit right now to some good news and, that is, I
23 think the California Nutrition Network has a real
24 chance, along with the other programs, other people
25 that are working together, to make a difference.

1 But there are some challenges in
2 that program that need to be addressed. Actually,
3 I'll go and do that a little bit in a minute.

4 The last couple of things I wanted
5 to say about the system is that I think that there
6 are some ways, particularly with EBT, that we might
7 be able to do value added for fruits and vegetables
8 and other healthy foods at the checkout counter of
9 supermarkets.

10 And one possible idea is that when a
11 person puts their EBT in, they get store coupons for
12 fruits and vegetables to redeem at their next
13 purchase.

14 That will do two things: One, fresh
15 foods are fresh, so they spoil quickly. It would
16 give them benefits for later on in the month. It
17 also would give an immediate reward for purchasing
18 more fruits and vegetables the next time around.

19 And so, at any rate, you've heard
20 about the stigma of the Food Stamp Program. Just as
21 a media person, I would like to second Gary
22 Swanson's and others' recommendations that there
23 will be a full-blown public relations campaign to
24 shore up the image of the new Food Stamp Program.

25 From a public health perspective,

1 I've already mentioned that more needs to be done on
2 the nutrition end side. \$35 billion is being spent
3 by the competition to market less healthy foods to
4 consumers, and so it's not an easy task. We've got
5 a lot of competition.

6 Food stamp education or nutrition
7 education is an optional requirement for state food
8 stamp plans, so it would be very important to make
9 that a mandatory requirement.

10 And I think particularly with the
11 scope of the problem, if we don't want to fail again
12 as we have been failing over the last 20 years, to
13 promote healthy eating, then we need together to
14 shore up the social marketing side of things. And
15 that may be with planning grants again, as has been
16 previously done in the past.

17 A few points on the income match. I
18 want to just compliment USDA on making income state
19 match a part of the food stamp administration,
20 qualifying funds.

21 And again, I'd like to acknowledge
22 the Western Regional Office of USDA and California
23 Department of Social Services for all the help that
24 they've provided in getting the California Nutrition
25 Network off the ground.

1 They've been very helpful in getting
2 waivers, but I think it would be good if some of the
3 requirements that are barriers could be cleaned up.

4 One of them is the exclusivity
5 clause, which restricts food stamp nutrition
6 education to food stamp beneficiaries rather than
7 expanding it to similar low-income households.

8 Another is the permanent exclusion
9 of people who have been convicted of a felony.

10 A third one is prohibiting cash
11 contributions from the state, the state income.

12 A fourth one is excluding school
13 districts who have fewer than 50 percent free
14 reduced price school lunch eligibility.

15 And I think those are the major ones
16 that I think would make a difference.

17 My very last point is that to do
18 this job, we're going to have to work together. It
19 was mentioned a partnership. I believe we need a
20 local, state, national partnership. USDA National
21 Cancer Institute, CDC can work together.

22 None of the federal agencies, just
23 like none of the state agencies, can do this alone.
24 And I think it's imperative that if we want to
25 succeed, we must have a plan.

1 It must be specific. It must say
2 who's going to do what, how things are going to get
3 paid to, and it must, of course, be consumer-driven,
4 it must be user-friendly, research-based and, of
5 course, it has to be one that is sustainable over
6 time.

7 So we look forward to working with
8 you and thank you so very much for the help that you
9 are currently providing to us.

10 MS. WATKINS: Thank you. We have a caller
11 on the line.

12 MR. McHALE: Hello.

13 MS. WATKINS: Is this Mike McHale?

14 MR. McHALE: Yes, ma'am, I am.

15 Ma'am, first, thank you very much
16 for coming all the way from Washington to discuss
17 and conversate about food stamps.

18 Everyone maybe has his good and bad
19 ideas. And they say it's a complex issue.

20 Ma'am, it is not that complex issue
21 because it is done and failing Congress to take care
22 of the low income.

23 We are the strongest nation on
24 earth. We feed the foreign countries, and we cannot
25 feed our own. And that's very sad.

1 However, the real objective about
2 why I called -- And I appreciate very much you
3 accepting my call -- is I am a retired person,
4 senior citizen, worked all my life with the Union
5 Pacific Railroad.

6 I pay my taxes, state and federal
7 taxes. Of course, the retirement was not that much.
8 I am low income, so I apply for help, assistance for
9 food stamps, and they are giving me \$10.

10 When I questioned the amount, I find
11 out that the Congress passed the law discriminating
12 against who's receiving pension and receiving Social
13 Security.

14 How they are discriminating, they
15 consider the low-income pension year and earned
16 income, so it is not available no more for the
17 20 percent deductible.

18 But, for instance, a janitor, he is
19 low income, he's working, they allow him the
20 20 percent discount because he has transportation
21 expenses to go to use the car. And even the
22 retiree, myself, I use the car to go to the doctor
23 appointments and et cetera, et cetera.

24 So the discriminatory practice by
25 the United States Congress, they are aware of it,

1 San Francisco, Alexander, Virginia, the President
2 and down the line, they know about it, but they talk
3 about Social Security. They don't talk about what
4 they did wrong to discriminate about unearned and
5 earned income.

6 I would appreciate it very much --
7 I'm not trying to be out of line by choosing
8 different words -- but I would appreciate it very
9 much if somebody look into that unearned and earned
10 income.

11 And if it is the law, which it is,
12 then they will tell Congress to correct it. Because
13 if a blind is leading a blind and others are wrong
14 and you know yourself it is wrong, that's shameful.

15 And that's all the comment I have to
16 say.

17 MS. WATKINS: Caller, thank you very much.
18 We appreciate your comments.

19 Our next speaker is Faustino Baclig.
20 A.G. Kawamura.

21 MR. KAWAMURA: My name is A.G. Kawamura.
22 Good afternoon, Panel.

23 I'm a farmer, a grower, here in
24 Orange County. I'm also a member of the State Board
25 of Agriculture here in California.

1 But my comments today, of course,
2 are as the president of the Orange County Harvest,
3 which is a nonprofit food assistance company that
4 has been trying very hard to deal with both gleaning
5 custom growing of food for the food banks and other
6 interesting projects that ties agriculture into this
7 entire conversation.

8 With the shortness of time, I really
9 wanted to cover a couple things, but today I think
10 enough has been said that if we could look at a new
11 way to frame maybe this entire argument of -- not
12 even argument, but the entire dialogue of what are
13 we trying to accomplish with our different food
14 programs, food assistance programs.

15 In the past, food assistance has
16 been a reaction to a couple of things, either
17 catastrophic events or a reaction to poverty and
18 what would seem to be the problems of lack of funds
19 for purchasing the food that you need.

20 The 1939 Food Stamp Program, as it
21 was laid out, was basically a reaction to some
22 severe poverty issues within the country.

23 The good intention of our democracy
24 has always been there. Perhaps one of the framework
25 for how we go about it has been lacking, and that's

1 what I wanted to talk about today.

2 I'm a grower and, again, the
3 interesting thing about how I look at our
4 agriculture is we spend a tremendous amount of time
5 and effort researching the crops that we grow.

6 In my case, let's say it's a crop of
7 green beans. In this country, the diet of chickens
8 is the most studied diet, I believe, on the planet.

9 And as a farmer, we're not
10 interested in minimum daily requirements. We're
11 interested in the requirements to let that animal or
12 let that organism, let that plant, thrive. And we
13 do everything we can to make those plants thrive in
14 our fields.

15 When we neglect them, whether it be
16 for a day, whether it be for a month, whether it be
17 for a chronic neglect because it's on the side of a
18 field and just doesn't get the fertilizer program or
19 the nutrition program, you can see the result so
20 very easily.

21 And so the question that we have to
22 ask in this reauthorization, and I think it's not
23 even a question, the memory that we need to bring
24 back is our entire goal in food assistance in this
25 country is that we need our population to be

1 thriving, not surviving.

2 It goes without saying that every
3 living thing that we nurture will thrive. And I
4 would repeat that. Every living thing that we
5 nurture thrives.

6 It's a very simple lesson that I
7 think farmers understand but, again, we've moved so
8 far away from where our food supply comes from, that
9 the rest of the country has forgotten some of these
10 very simple lessons.

11 When we look at malnutrition,
12 obviously, hunger is a symptom of malnutrition;
13 obesity is a symptom of malnutrition.

14 We look at minor element
15 deficiencies in our plants. Minor element
16 deficiencies in children could be, and has been,
17 linked to immune deficiency, behavioral problems,
18 attention deficit syndrome, poor grades, poor
19 performance.

20 The simple question that we need to
21 understand is, I believe, we're spending the right
22 amount of money in our programs. I don't think
23 we're getting the bang for the buck.

24 As a farmer, to see 40-something
25 billion dollars in food assistance is close to being

1 an outrage in what we're accomplishing with that
2 40-something billion dollars.

3 It's an enormous amount of money.
4 The entire state of California, all of its ag.
5 production at the farm gate, both edible and
6 nonedible, is some 40-something billion dollars.
7 And we produce a lot of food in this state.

8 I appreciate the comments from
9 almost everybody that's been involved at the ground
10 level in trying to meet the needs of the
11 populations.

12 I do believe local solutions do work
13 the best. I do believe that the federal government
14 can and should encourage and look at what an earlier
15 speaker had said, to look for those successful
16 programs, fund them, find the way to get them
17 working, make them the pilot programs that can shine
18 as a national example, and then follow suit and make
19 them work. Not a whole lot more than that.

20 It would have been a longer
21 presentation, but I appreciate you guys being here
22 from D.C., and I hope to be a part of this dialogue
23 in the future. Thank you.

24 MS. WATKINS: Thank you very much.
25 Patricia Krommer. Karen Israel.

1 MS. ISRAEL: Good afternoon. My name is
2 Karen Israel. I've been asked to make this address
3 today to represent the parents, the teachers, staff
4 at 59th Street School where we are right now being
5 provided with a salad bar program.

6 I want to start off saying that,
7 first of all, I took a poll today at the school and
8 out of 271 children at the school right now -- It's
9 a year-around program, so we are -- There are only
10 271 represented right now with two tracks on.

11 Out of the 271 children at the
12 program, there are 236 children who use the salad
13 bar. There are 35 -- I'm sorry -- 236 children who
14 use the salad bar three or more times per week.
15 Okay? There are 35 who use it once or less per
16 week.

17 And what's going on is, I
18 understand, that funding could be cut off from this
19 program. And our children, our parents, our
20 teachers, the staff, really want the program to
21 continue.

22 They are not just getting the
23 nutrition that they most definitely need, but they
24 are getting education as well with this program,
25 with the salad bar program.

1 They're also having hands-on
2 agricultural gardening at the school site.

3 The testimonies of many of the
4 teachers are that the curriculum bonuses are that
5 the children are learning about insects, flowers,
6 about animals at the farms where this food is
7 provided, through the Farmers Markets.

8 The life cycles that go on, the
9 responsibilities children are learning, watering,
10 and weeding, taking care of these gardens, fully and
11 completely.

12 They're caring for something and
13 understanding the needs of these things. They're
14 also learning chemistry, biology, other scientific
15 facts. They're including math and cultural, and I
16 understand even storytelling.

17 And not just that but, of course,
18 the nutrition they're gaining from this program.

19 100 percent of this food -- This
20 food is 100 percent organically grown.

21 Also, testimonies of the cafeteria
22 workers, teachers and other parents, I continually
23 hear, when I interview them about the choices that
24 the children are having, the nutritional choices
25 that they're having through this program, meaning

1 that versus hot lunch, they are able to have a salad
2 bar, which is wonderful because the children, of
3 course, need these nutritional foods.

4 MS. WATKINS: Ms. Israel, this is a Food
5 Stamp Conversation. And I know you are perhaps
6 concerned about the school meals program.

7 We are going to have some
8 conversations later on about the school meals
9 program and team nutrition, but we'd like to focus
10 our attention today on food stamps and the Food
11 Stamp Program.

12 Thank you very much.

13 MS. TOWRY: I'd like to interject. Her
14 program is being funded through the California
15 Nutrition Network, which is the program I spoke of
16 earlier, and that is why she's here to testify.
17 Thank you.

18 MS. WATKINS: Right. Thank you.

19 Maria Torres. David Carroll.

20 MR. CARROLL: Good afternoon. My name is
21 David Carroll, and I'm a policy analyst with the
22 California Budget Project, which is a nonprofit
23 organization in Sacramento that engages in policy
24 analysis as well as public education in order to
25 improve public policies that affect low-income

1 Californians.

2 Because time is short, I'll just
3 restrict my comments to a couple brief points. I am
4 a bit of a data geek, so I will be a little
5 data-oriented, so bear with me, please.

6 While Californians have been
7 experiencing an unprecedented economic boom, many
8 families in California have actually lower earnings
9 and incomes than ten years ago, according to our
10 office, which we'll be releasing next week.

11 The national median income rose by
12 nearly 5 percent over the last decade, yet the
13 income for the average California family fell over
14 the same time period.

15 In addition, more Californians
16 earned poverty level wages in 1999 than 1989. More
17 often, median wages dropped by over 6 percent
18 between 1989 and 1999, and hourly wages of workers
19 of the 20th percentile of the wage distribution fell
20 by 7-1/2 percent.

21 These low-wage workers now are
22 earning over \$7 an hour. So these trends point to
23 an increasing need for food assistance.

24 The California Budget Project has
25 also estimated how much it cost to raise a family in

1 California by constructing a basic family budget; a
2 conservative budget that includes a basic cost of
3 living.

4 We estimate that a single parent
5 with two children needs to earn \$18 an hour to
6 provide for these basic costs. For families with
7 two working parents, each parent must earn \$11 an
8 hour.

9 In contrast, low-wage workers in
10 California are earning \$7 an hour. Also, the wages
11 required to support this basic family budget are far
12 above the hourly equivalent of the food stamp
13 threshold, which translates to an hourly wage of
14 about \$9 for a family of three and \$11 for a family
15 of four.

16 For us, this points to the
17 importance of increasing the food stamp threshold.
18 Food stamps are, obviously, one way to bridge the
19 gap between low wages and the high cost of living in
20 California.

21 However, to make the program more
22 effective, the California Budget Project suggests
23 the following improvements: Increase the income
24 threshold to reach more families who are unable to
25 make ends meet.

1 Alter or eliminate the vehicle
2 assets test so that low-wage workers can have
3 reliable transportation to work and still maintain
4 food stamp eligibility.

5 Ensure that former welfare
6 recipients receive the food stamps to which they're
7 entitled. Expand and strengthen outreach education
8 about the program.

9 Simplify the application process,
10 restore benefits to legal immigrants and improve
11 data collection and analysis to be able to better
12 understand why food stamp participation has
13 decreased so dramatically recently.

14 Thank you very much for your time.

15 MS. WATKINS: Thank you. Reverend Eugene
16 Boutilier.

17 REVEREND BOUTILIER: Good afternoon. I'm a
18 minister with the United Church of Christ, an active
19 volunteer with California Food Policy Advocates, and
20 with the L.A. Coalition to End Hunger and
21 Homelessness, and have been for some decades.

22 I want to reinforce, without further
23 comment, the testimony and the written reports that
24 have been given to you by California Food Policy
25 Advocates, by the L.A. Coalition and the recipient

1 participants that came from them.

2 I was very pleased with comments
3 from L.A. County and from the budget project and
4 others about specific ways to improve the program.

5 But I'd like to spend these couple
6 of minutes talking about the danger and the
7 possibility of this coming reauthorization and the
8 rhetoric, which has to do with stigma and acceptance
9 of the Food Stamp Program.

10 I don't think it's true that the
11 stigma that many people have referred to today comes
12 out of the soul of the American people. I think it
13 comes from politicians badmouthing, using food
14 stamps as a wedge issue, smashing on poverty as they
15 do on other targets for the purpose of elective
16 campaigns.

17 It's nasty, it's continuing, it's
18 intentional, and it doesn't come from the soul of
19 the American people. It comes from politicians on
20 the make.

21 There will be quite a bit of that in
22 the food stamp authorization process. We advocates
23 and the Department have to stand firm in opposing
24 and reducing the opportunity for that kind of
25 nastiness. It is manufactured. It isn't part of

1 the national soul of the American people.

2 And among the things we can do to
3 help with it is not only call it for what it is when
4 it happens, and bureaucrats can do that just as well
5 as advocates -- You sometimes have to be sneaky
6 about how you do it -- but there are certainly ways,
7 and you experienced bureaucrats know how. Don't let
8 them get away with that kind of badmouthing.

9 Another thing to do is to keep
10 emphasizing how the Food Stamp Program really is a
11 privatized program.

12 It is an improvement over the
13 commodities program in which we harnessed the energy
14 of the main line existing food distribution system
15 in America, the trucks, the groceries, the farmers,
16 and bypassed the special government way of getting
17 food to people who were hungry.

18 It is a privatized program already
19 and let's emphasize and strengthen that. You ought
20 to be outspoken, the food industry.

21 We have been somewhat unsuccessful
22 in our attempts to do that on behalf of legal
23 immigrants in the successful campaign to get
24 extensions of food stamps under state funding.

25 The food industry needed to be out

1 front. They benefit financially. And they were
2 very quiet. They were quiet because they were
3 afraid of politicians.

4 We need to make them afraid of not
5 standing up for the program. They need to take
6 their turn, in saying this is good for America, it's
7 good for our industry, and politicians please
8 support it. That is one of the ways to do it.

9 Another way to do it is to keep
10 emphasizing that food stamps is a health maintenance
11 program/bad health prevention program.

12 It is a way to improve the health of
13 America on the cheap, compared to the programs to
14 fix people like me after we've already declined in
15 health.

16 The way food stamps got started in
17 politics was especially because of the large number
18 of draftees in World War II and in the years
19 afterwards who were in very bad nutritional state
20 because of their poverty.

21 They were weakening America and
22 America grew alarmed and said we must do a better
23 job of nutrition for our people. Still true today.

24 And we must emphasize that and not
25 let the people who want to say this is just welfare

1 and welfare is bad, not let them say that.

2 Then also, because this is part of a
3 whole program for poverty, we must be very careful
4 not to let ourselves fall into the trap regarding
5 stigma of saying, well, this is a good program, it
6 isn't welfare.

7 And we must all be careful not to do
8 that, but we can say because of the damage that that
9 does to CalWORKS and TANF and other programs which
10 we need to protect.

11 So if we emphasize how efficient and
12 privatized it is and how it's good for America on
13 the issue of health, and if we don't let political
14 trashing of this program take place, stand up
15 against it, speak out against it, warn politicians
16 of the consequences, then we can not only protect
17 this program, we can also create a climate in which
18 the many recommendations for improvements that have
19 been made today can become politically possible.

20 I hope you'll join us in doing that
21 and don't take that stuff from them. Don't let them
22 do it.

23 It's unAmerican for them to attack
24 our health and our industry and the needs of our
25 people the way they've been doing, just for a few

1 votes. Thank you.

2 MS. WATKINS: Thank you. Andy Fisher.

3 MR. FISHER: Good afternoon. I want to
4 thank you for the opportunity to present testimony
5 here today.

6 My name is Andy Fisher. I'm the
7 director of the Community Food Security Coalition,
8 which is a national alliance of over 275
9 organizations dedicated to promoting
10 self-reliance-based solutions to the nation's hunger
11 and nutrition problems and to supporting
12 locally-based food systems.

13 I would first like to applaud Food
14 and Nutrition Service for its commitment to food
15 security and for its support for the community food
16 security initiative.

17 We greatly appreciate FNS for
18 encouraging food to purchase from local farmers, and
19 we look forward to collaborating with FNS in the
20 future.

21 I'm here to speak about the EBT and
22 Farmers Market.

23 As numerous studies point out,
24 especially among the nation's poor, encouraging
25 healthy diets need to be a central facet of the Food

1 Stamp Program.

2 Yet, in many communities, access to
3 the foods that comprise healthy diets can be
4 problematic given the lack of grocery stores in core
5 urban areas.

6 Farmers Markets have proven
7 effective in increasing access to farm fresh
8 high-quality produce in these and many other
9 communities across the country.

10 The WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition
11 Program has already shown the nutrition education
12 benefits of Farmers Markets. Yet, in states where
13 EBT has been implemented, food stamp recipients
14 cannot redeem their benefits at Farmers Markets,
15 primarily for technological reasons.

16 Food and Nutrition Service, again,
17 should be commended in rectifying the situation
18 through allowing pilot projects in various states.
19 Yet, it needs to go further.

20 The vast majority of Farmers Markets
21 in the country can no longer accept food stamps.
22 The sustainability of the few pilot projects in
23 existence is in question.

24 Here in California, food stamp usage
25 at Farmers Markets is among the highest of all

1 states, with millions of dollars redeemed annually.

2 A dozen markets could go under,
3 affecting food access for thousands of people and
4 the livelihood of dozens of farmers if a solution is
5 not found to allow recipients to continue using
6 their food stamps at these markets once EBT is
7 implemented in the state.

8 The Community Food Security
9 Coalition and the state Nutrition Network are
10 working with state agencies to develop a series of
11 pilot projects across California.

12 I would like to encourage FNS to
13 scale up its efforts in the realm, including
14 finalizing its action plan as outlined in goal 3.4
15 of the CFS initiative, using its pulpit to convince
16 the primary EBT contractor, Citicorps, with EBT
17 capacity and putting additional funds into future
18 years' budgets, to support pilot projects, food
19 stamp recipient outreach for pilot purposes.

20 Thank you.

21 MS. WATKINS: Thank you. Frank Tamborello.

22 MR. TAMBORELLO: Actually, I traded places
23 with --

24 MS. CAMARGO: Eulalia Camargo.

25 MS. BARRERA: We're asking a translator, a

1 Spanish translator. Is there one being provided?

2 MS. CAMARGO: (Through the interpreter)

3 Good afternoon. My name is Eulalia Camargo, and I
4 don't have any prepared speech.

5 I want to tell you about an
6 experience I had in 1992. I had an accident in
7 1992, and I did not work for six months.

8 I went to the food stamp office to
9 solicit help for food. I spent the whole day in the
10 office.

11 When my turn arrived to talk to the
12 person, they denied me the stamps because I worked
13 three days.

14 I want everybody to know, everybody
15 present to know, that the work as a housekeeper,
16 it's paid very lowly. And our salary is not
17 sufficient because we have to pay rent, utilities,
18 telephone. And the food prices have risen. And our
19 salaries are not enough.

20 I would like to know if in the
21 future -- I want to ask if in the future I can
22 solicit for stamps, because what I make is very
23 little.

24 I only get 175 or 150 per week. And
25 I'm also speaking on behalf of all the housekeepers.

1 I would like to know if when I
2 arrive to be 65 -- At this moment I am 63 -- I could
3 apply for these stamps.

4 I have a son living with me, but he
5 works four hours a night and he studies during the
6 day.

7 We commented among us about whether
8 to get or not the stamps because of the fact that we
9 are Latinos, we always have denials when we ask for
10 this service.

11 Could you answer me in writing so I
12 could tell my other coworkers and I could take them
13 your message?

14 MS. WATKINS: We will provide some
15 information through the regional office so that they
16 can provide some information to you in support and
17 some help in working with the state.

18 MS. CAMARGO: (Through the interpreter)
19 We're hoping that we can get help from you for all
20 the people that need it.

21 In the neighborhood where I live,
22 there's a lot of people that need the stamps. A lot
23 of people don't solicit them because they are scared
24 because they don't have papers. And me, being
25 legal, the service was denied to me.

1 MS. WATKINS: In order for us to provide
2 information and provide you the support that you are
3 requesting, we need a telephone number and address.
4 And I'm not sure that this is correct. Is it (213)
5 389-7974, the correct telephone number?

6 THE INTERPRETER: She will leave it as soon
7 as she exits.

8 MS. BARRERA: She's actually number 50, so
9 if you look at that.

10 MS. WATKINS: I do have number 50 and that
11 was the number that I read off. So if that's
12 correct, then we also need a correct address, so we
13 can provide information and call and make the
14 necessary telephone call.

15 MS. CAMARGO: (Through the interpreter)
16 Thank you very much.

17 MS. WATKINS: Janice Hunt.

18 MS. HUNT: Hello. I'm Janice Hunt, one of
19 the managers from the California Department of
20 Education Nutrition Services division.

21 And Marilyn Griggs, our director,
22 regrets that she was unable to come today, but she's
23 asked me to say just a couple things.

24 One is that she wants to let you
25 know that she supports all efforts to simplify the

1 process for making food stamps eligible for
2 participants.

3 And also to remind, which I'm sure
4 you all know, that food stamp participants, the
5 children, are automatically eligible for child
6 nutrition program meals.

7 And any decrease in participation
8 also decrease the children's access to other
9 nutritious meals.

10 And we all know the link between
11 nutrition and learning. And so that sort of breaks
12 the link there and puts a large segment of the
13 population at risk for school failure as well as
14 other health issues.

15 The other issue she wanted me to
16 bring forth is the direct cert. In California, we
17 have about 836 public schools, and of those only 236
18 participate in direct cert.

19 The direct cert. is a sharing of
20 eligibility information for food stamps and CalWORKS
21 or TANF between the Department of Social Services
22 and school districts. And we only have about
23 25 percent participating right now.

24 We believe that there are a lot more
25 that could participate if there was a -- maybe not a

1 law, but perhaps a strong policy decision requiring
2 some sort of collaborative or partnership between
3 the school districts and the Department of Social
4 Services so that more children would have access to
5 nutritious meals at the national school lunch level
6 and the child care food program level as well as the
7 summer food service program.

8 The other issue we've noticed is
9 particularly in the summer food service program that
10 when the food stamp offices share with their
11 participants that they are eligible for free meals,
12 we've noticed an increase in participation.

13 So we would like to see some sort of
14 a policy decision to also require that the
15 administering agency of food stamps notify their
16 participants that they are eligible for meals in the
17 Child Nutrition Programs, the National School Lunch
18 Child Care Food Program and the Summer Program.

19 And thank you for coming.

20 MS. WATKINS: Thank you. Larry Walker.
21 Michael Flood.

22 MR. FLOOD: Thank you. My name is Michael
23 Flood. I serve as executive director of the Los
24 Angeles Regional Food Bank and also represent as
25 president of the California Association of Food

1 Banks. And after four and a half hours, it's
2 obviously very hard to be original.

3 I've been here in Los Angeles for
4 two months, but in food banking for ten years.

5 And during this time, the number of
6 people who are served by the charitable food network
7 has increased dramatically and the number of people
8 who are on the Food Stamp Program has decreased
9 dramatically.

10 This is not an intended trend for
11 those of us who are in food banks. During this
12 time, hunger has not gone down. If anything, it has
13 increased.

14 It's hardly an original idea, but
15 quite simply, the Food Stamp Program needs to become
16 the program that is the nutritional safety net for
17 low-income Americans.

18 If we take that as the goal, then
19 all of a sudden, program implementation, all of our
20 assumptions of how we run the program, regulations
21 and everything else changes.

22 For example, at the federal level,
23 the one measurement for food stamps is not error
24 rate, but the percent of people served in a state or
25 in a county or in any other locality.

1 Looking at that, all of a sudden the
2 county office that's implementing, in trying to
3 reach people, has different goals.

4 All of a sudden, it's not as
5 important that the application is as many pages as
6 it is today and, as a footnote, for someone who's
7 moving, is longer than a home mortgage application.

8 The federal mandate that we send
9 down to the states reverberates all the way down to
10 the counties and all the way down to that local
11 worker.

12 And for those of us who are in food
13 banks, or many of us -- I don't speak for all of
14 us -- we don't want to see our warehouses get
15 larger.

16 We don't want to try to see what
17 more creative ways we can reach out to people,
18 because we don't feel that we can, once again,
19 triple or quadruple our service.

20 It's taken a long time for us to
21 grow to the level where we are today. We feel we're
22 an important part of providing a solution for hunger
23 in America, but we are not the solution.

24 We need to be able to fully
25 complement the Food Stamp Program and many other

1 nutrition programs so that hungry Americans can get
2 the help that they need.

3 A few other things that I think many
4 of us are concerned about, especially here in
5 California, are the fact that we have the same
6 income guidelines across this whole country.

7 We have many areas in California
8 where the current food stamp income guidelines don't
9 make any sense.

10 We have many people over those
11 income guidelines that need help and, thus, guess
12 what, they come to a food panty or soup kitchen or
13 some other service provider.

14 The Thrifty Food Plan, as we've
15 heard, no longer makes any sense. Of course, that's
16 going to take big dollars at the federal level to
17 change setting it at 110 percent of the Thrifty Food
18 Plan or moving up to a higher plan altogether.

19 Obviously, we're talking about big
20 dollars, but again, if the priority is to provide a
21 safety net for people who need nutrition, then all
22 of a sudden those dollars, it may make more sense to
23 make that investment.

24 I mentioned the application here.
25 We realize that's a state issue. There's some work

1 in the state legislature to work on that issue, but
2 it's huge here in California.

3 We're also sending, I think, the
4 wrong message to folks when, at the federal and
5 state level, we talk and respectfully say we hand
6 wring about the drops in food stamps, yet at the
7 same time, we roll out a fingerimaging project that
8 sends the message that this is just like another
9 welfare program where we're extremely concerned that
10 people are getting \$1 more than what's due to them,
11 even though, as we all know, food stamps last about
12 two weeks.

13 It doesn't seem to make a lot of
14 sense. It's not a great investment.

15 Here in the county, I haven't really
16 been able -- had a chance to sit down with county
17 officials, but I know the county here has a
18 reputation for pushing the envelope in trying to
19 serve more people.

20 There's an outreach program in
21 place, and I would encourage, at the federal level,
22 that we be allowed at county levels to test things,
23 try things that are innovative.

24 Outstationing has been mentioned as
25 hardly an original idea, but even involving

1 Community Based Organizations to sign up people.
2 Why not.

3 Many of the people seeking food
4 assistance, unfortunately, many are not on food
5 stamps. Thus, we target, hopefully, food stamp
6 outreach workers at those sites. But providing an
7 application isn't enough. Let's sign them up right
8 there and get them in the program.

9 Finally, there are a number of
10 people who are not here today and part of it,
11 obviously, is because we have a very low utilization
12 of food stamps.

13 Many hunger reports have come out
14 recently that document the fastest growing group in
15 need are working families with children. And the
16 system is really not set up to serve them, both in
17 terms of the hours of operation of offices, the
18 application form, these monthly reports that need to
19 be sent in.

20 You know, the whole system is not
21 set up to deal with working families and children
22 and many others.

23 And of course, here in California,
24 the legal immigrant issue, as you've heard, is huge.

25 And also, another issue that,

1 unfortunantely, I don't think you have any authority
2 over is the whole SSI population. Here they're
3 cashed out. They've been cashed out for years.
4 They get a \$10 allotment as part of their SSI grant.

5 Many are not saying let's put them
6 in the Food Stamp Program, so they have to start
7 applying in two different offices but, guess what,
8 on \$663 a month, they're all in our monthly food
9 lines at pantries, USDA commodity sites, and the
10 like.

11 So those are my thoughts. And
12 again, I'm glad you've come to Los Angeles to
13 listen. And we hope to see you again here.

14 MS. WATKINS: Thank you.

15 Marc Dhondt. Paula Gaber. Laura
16 Barrera.

17 MS. BARRERA: Good evening. I guess it's
18 evening about now.

19 I would like to start by introducing
20 myself. My name is Laura Barrera. I am the
21 director for the welfare reform project with CHIRLA,
22 which stands for the Coalition for Humane Immigrant
23 Rights of Los Angeles.

24 I would like to start off by
25 thanking you for this opportunity to discuss the

1 ways in which to strengthen the Food Stamp Program
2 and help improve access to nutrition assistance for
3 immigrant families.

4 The Coalition for Humane Immigrant
5 Rights of Los Angeles, CHIRLA, is a nonprofit
6 organization founded in '86 to advance the human and
7 civil rights of immigrants and refugees in Los
8 Angeles.

9 As a multi-ethnic coalition of
10 community organizations and individuals, CHIRLA aims
11 to foster greater understanding of issues that
12 affect immigrant communities and also to provide a
13 neutral forum for discussion.

14 I am here today to speak on behalf
15 of those who could not be here today because they
16 are held up in their two to three jobs that are
17 needed in order to ensure that there is enough food
18 on the table for their children tonight.

19 I am here representing a mother with
20 three children who left the Food Stamp Program only
21 to end up in the lines of a local food pantry and
22 the mother who was deterred from accessing food
23 stamps after her eligibility worker told her that if
24 she was hungry, to go recycle cans.

25 I am here representing the immigrant

1 community of Los Angeles whose children are going to
2 sleep hungry every night.

3 As you all know, immigrants are
4 challenged by the same problems that all others face
5 with the current Food Stamp Program.

6 But beyond that, many immigrants are
7 confronted with the even larger problem of not being
8 able to access food stamp benefits because of the
9 day they entered the country.

10 In excluding thousands of immigrants
11 based on the date they entered the country, current
12 law also hurts U.S. citizen children.

13 1 in 10 U.S. citizen children lives
14 in a family with at least one noncitizen parent and
15 one U.S. citizen child.

16 As noncitizen parents and siblings
17 lose benefits, there will definitely and there will
18 continue to be a sharp decline in total household
19 resources; therefore, putting thousands of children
20 at risk.

21 Even when they are eligible,
22 immigrants face huge barriers that keep them from
23 getting help. These include the lack of qualified
24 interpreters and culturally and linguistically
25 appropriate materials.

1 The result: People being sanctioned
2 off or not complying with the rules they never knew
3 existed or couldn't understand or they simply just
4 decided to walk out because of frustration.

5 Also, complicated eligibility rules,
6 misinformation and fear of INS reporting have
7 discouraged immigrants from using even the most
8 basic services they're eligible for.

9 The result: A national drop of
10 75 percent of citizen children of immigrant parents
11 off of the food stamp rolls. Immigrant parents
12 choosing between feeding their children and the
13 possible repercussions with INS.

14 The current Food Stamp Program does
15 not meet the needs of immigrants.

16 There are several key changes which,
17 if instituted, would dramatically improve the
18 ability of eligible immigrants to access the Food
19 Stamp Program.

20 There is the need to improve
21 efforts, to provide outreach to immigrant
22 communities, to begin to provide adequate
23 interpretive services and hiring bilingual staff,
24 offering materials in languages that reflect the
25 diversity of the communities served and, lastly, the

1 creation of a system of comprehensive
2 confidentiality to eliminate the overriding fear
3 with an immigrant community that information
4 provided to gain benefits would be turned over to
5 the INS.

6 Lastly, food stamp eligibility
7 should not be based on need -- I'm sorry -- should
8 be exclusively based on need.

9 We cannot allow arbitrary measures,
10 such as the date of entry, to be a limitless test
11 for those who receive food stamps.

12 Before I finish, I request your
13 support for the Hunger Relief Act, a legislative
14 proposal currently being proposed before Congress,
15 which would restore food stamps to lawful present
16 immigrants, regardless of when they entered the
17 country.

18 It would also eliminate deeming of
19 sponsor income for state programs that are
20 comparable to the federal Food Stamp Program and
21 establish an exemption to sponsor liability under
22 certain circumstances.

23 There is already wide bipartisan
24 support on this bill, but a final push by the USDA
25 is definitely needed.

1 After hearing me speak before you
2 today, I hope that it becomes very evident that
3 welfare reform has only helped but a handful.

4 It seems to me that no one here
5 lacks the common sense to see that policy changes
6 that took place in '96 have hurt the very people
7 they were intended to help.

8 The best way I can summarize
9 everything I have said today is, people are going
10 hungry and it is your responsibility to take
11 whatever information has been provided to you today
12 and alleviate issues of access for immigrants and
13 for all low-income families. Thank you.

14 MS. WATKINS: Thank you. Dennis Kao.

15 MR. KAO: Good afternoon. My name is
16 Dennis Kao, and I'm representing the Asian Pacific
17 American Legal Center, which is a civil rights
18 organization serving the Asian Pacific Islander
19 community here in Los Angeles County.

20 First of all, I would like to thank
21 you for spending six hours, or five hours now, with
22 us, listening to our concerns.

23 I think it's definitely a great sign
24 to know that the USDA is here in Los Angeles and
25 wants to hear our concerns.

1 I truly believe and the legal center
2 truly believes that hunger continues to be a serious
3 problem in the Asian Pacific Islander community as
4 well as the broader immigrant community.

5 We have some very rough estimates
6 that about 30,000 APIs are currently accessing the
7 Food Stamp Program here in Los Angeles County.

8 And we have even more rougher
9 estimates that about 100,000 low-income Asian
10 Pacific Islanders continue to not participate in the
11 Food Stamp Program, which is about three times as
12 many as those who are actually on the program.

13 And so this is a serious concern.
14 And for that reason, we've chosen to focus our
15 priorities on access, because we're finding that the
16 majority of our communities are not even getting
17 through the door.

18 We've recently conducted a survey of
19 17 Community Based Organizations that serve the
20 Asian Pacific Islander community -- And we've
21 actually submitted it as written comments -- asking
22 them what are some of the key barriers that prevent
23 their clients or the communities that they serve, to
24 prevent their clients from accessing the Food Stamp
25 Program.

1 And I would like to highlight some
2 of the information from that report as well as some
3 recommendations.

4 The top four barriers to the Food
5 Stamp Program, according to the CBOs who were
6 surveyed, include just general confusion. That's
7 the top one.

8 There still is, and unfortunately
9 because of welfare reform, the underlying effects or
10 the unintended effects of welfare reform still
11 linger three years later.

12 There's still a tremendous amount of
13 confusion on who is eligible, who is not eligible,
14 who could be eligible, and so forth.

15 Even despite the fact that
16 California decided to step in to fill in the gaps,
17 and to try to attempt to create a seamless food
18 stamp safety net here in California, immigrants, as
19 we know, are still not accessing the Food Stamp
20 Program because they don't know that they're
21 eligible.

22 We also hear reports that
23 eligibility workers are still denying immigrants, or
24 Asian Pacific Islander immigrants as well, denying
25 food stamps to them even though we believe that

1 they're eligible.

2 And so there's still a large amount
3 of misinformation, not only among eligibility
4 workers, but as well as the advocacy community and
5 CBOs, because the laws are so confusing.

6 And so I think one of the
7 recommendations I would suggest that would alleviate
8 this problem totally is just to restore food stamps
9 to immigrants period, to create the federal safety
10 net, a seamless safety net.

11 And we don't have to worry about,
12 you know, if they came before August 22, 1996 or
13 came after, et cetera, et cetera; do they fall under
14 one of the categories that may be eligible.

15 There is also a serious need for a
16 comprehensive culturally relevant outreach strategy
17 that is targeted to each specific community.

18 What we found in our experience is
19 that each Asian Pacific Islander community, the
20 outreach strategies may be different.

21 Some communities have, you know,
22 greater resources, may have CBOs that have been
23 serving the community for a long period of time, and
24 it's very easy to do outreach through these CBOs.

25 Other smaller communities,

1 unfortunately, don't have those type of resources
2 and may not have adequate infrastructure to do the
3 same type of outreach as maybe other communities.

4 And so a comprehensive strategy that
5 involves CBOs, but also hopefully takes a more
6 proactive approach from the government to put in
7 funds specifically to target those underserved
8 communities.

9 The second barrier -- And I'm going
10 to try to speed up a little bit. The second barrier
11 is like Laura, my colleague, mentioned, the
12 confusion around public charge is a second barrier,
13 according to the CBOs surveyed.

14 And I think part of this is also an
15 issue of mistrust. I think some folks may hear
16 that, oh, food stamps is a safe program. And we can
17 tell them very clearly that food stamps is a safe
18 program.

19 But I think just years after fear,
20 years after just confusion, misinformation, I think
21 there's just a large amount of mistrust that's out
22 in the immigrant communities as a whole, and also in
23 my area of work, the Asian Pacific Islander
24 community.

25 And one of the things that I think

1 was mentioned earlier is that L.A. County has
2 started this pilot program where outstation Medi-Cal
3 workers are actually accepting food stamp
4 applications now. And I think that's a step in the
5 right direction.

6 I think many of the CBOs that we
7 talked to mentioned that, you know, if the
8 application was actually at places of trust, venues
9 of trust, where people actually trust where they're
10 going, I think there will be more food stamp
11 applications -- or more food stamp participation.

12 Two more barriers. The third
13 barrier that came out, actually surprisingly,
14 because here in L.A. County we've had the
15 fingerprint imaging program for a little while now,
16 but the third barrier was the fear of the statewide
17 fingerimaging system. And that came out as a big
18 surprise for us.

19 And I think the issue there is
20 whether or not -- again, a mistrust issue, whether
21 or not that information is really going to be
22 confidential.

23 We may tell, you know, our clients,
24 we may tell our community, that it's going to be
25 confidential. But again, that issue of mistrust.

1 And then finally -- And this was
2 touched upon again before, earlier -- the whole
3 issue of language access.

4 I think when people think of
5 translations or maybe bilingual workers, I think
6 automatically they think Spanish-speaking.

7 And I think that's understandable
8 given the large population of Spanish-speaking
9 people here in California as well as statewide.

10 Unfortunately, oftentimes that's
11 where it stops. For example, I definitely applaud
12 the USDA's efforts for food stamp outreach, and I
13 love the brochures that you came out with.
14 Unfortunately, they weren't translated into any
15 language that we, as an agency, could use.

16 And so I think, again, that's just
17 an example of how translations or the whole idea of
18 bilingual services often only means English and
19 Spanish.

20 And we need to take that a step
21 further and say we want to pour some funding
22 specifically to translate into more languages,
23 specifically to train more bilingual workers.

24 And then finally, in conclusion, I
25 think when you think about the immigrant community,

1 I think the one key thing to remember is there needs
2 to be a consistent message over a long period of
3 time.

4 Unfortunately, over the past many
5 years, because of welfare reform and et cetera,
6 there's been mixed messages. Right?

7 On one hand, you're saying this is
8 such a great program, come on board. This will help
9 you.

10 On the other hand, the program is so
11 restrictive and so intimidating that it's hard for
12 folks to even walk to the door, and they're scared
13 to.

14 On one hand, you say this program is
15 great. But on the other hand, you cut immigrants
16 off the program for a little while, restore some of
17 them, but now families have -- you know, as a
18 nation, families may have some people who are
19 eligible and some people who aren't.

20 And again, that's a mixed message.
21 And so I urge you and I hope -- I look forward to
22 working with you all in the future, and thank you.

23 MS. WATKINS: Thank you. Etha Robinson.

24 MS. ROBINSON: Here she is. I should say,
25 here I am. Good evening. I would like to thank all

1 of you for being here this afternoon.

2 I'm Etha Robinson. I'm with the
3 African-American Food Association, and I'm also a
4 high school health teacher. So I feel like I'm in a
5 dual role trying to speak here this afternoon.

6 It's been wonderful listening to all
7 the comments and, as I was listening, I said, you
8 know what, maybe we need to form some polygynous
9 relationships between some of these agencies and the
10 U.S. Government.

11 I said, maybe we need to have a
12 marriage between the food stamps, food security, the
13 INS, transportation and nutrition.

14 If we could have some of these
15 organizations getting married or maybe inhabiting
16 the same home, maybe we could solve some of the
17 problems, rather than everybody trying to live in
18 the room and close the door and separate themselves,
19 because by working together, I think we can solve a
20 lot of the other problems.

21 Also, I think the family reunions
22 are important entities that are cropping up now.
23 And all of us, in our families, have some people who
24 may be homeless, who may be on drugs, and I think
25 they may also serve as a source for information

1 about family members and where they are.

2 They may want to contribute to them,
3 but they don't want to give them money directly to
4 the member, but they may be able to assist in other
5 ways.

6 So family reunions, I think, may be
7 able to help us in solving some of our hunger
8 problems.

9 One of the other things I think we
10 need to look at is hunger is not just a
11 physiological disease. It's also a spiritual, it's
12 a social, and it's also a psychological as well as a
13 cultural illness.

14 We use food to celebrate many of our
15 activities: marriage, death, retirement. We use
16 foods to celebrate those items.

17 As one of the young men mentioned
18 earlier, if you're homeless and you buy food, you
19 have no way to prepare it.

20 So one of the things that I thought
21 about was the possibility of creating food homes or
22 houses in communities, where people who have food
23 stamps and are homeless can either come, use their
24 food stamps to purchase foods that have been
25 prepared that, let's say, have been gotten from

1 farmers or food markets, or where they could
2 actually come and stick their frozen burrito in a
3 microwave or have a stove.

4 And they would also have an
5 opportunity to talk to people. I think it's
6 horrible to eat alone. Usually if you go out and
7 you see a person sitting alone, you say she probably
8 doesn't have a husband or he probably doesn't have a
9 wife.

10 We tend to use food as a social
11 entity that brings us together in celebration.

12 Also, along the possibility of
13 organizing and solving hunger, hunger is a local
14 problem. If I'm hungry, I do not have time to call
15 Washington, D.C. or New York or anyplace. I want
16 some food right now. And I think we need to look at
17 how can we solve hunger as a local problem.

18 One of the things food is, food is
19 also ethnic. If I'm hungry, I probably want some
20 collared greens and some fried okra, some smothered
21 tomatoes, maybe some corn bread. Somebody else may
22 want some tamales or some chop suey or whatever.

23 And I think that if we have places
24 where people can have access to their cultural food,
25 I think it would also be beneficial to them morally

1 and spiritually.

2 If there were homes, let's say, that
3 have been vacated, that could be used for these safe
4 food houses, or whatever you want to call them,
5 where people can actually come in, have access to
6 either helping getting food using their food stamps
7 or using their debit card or even being able to
8 maybe take a shower and get some food.

9 Because if you go into a restaurant,
10 if you haven't had a bath in a few days, people
11 don't necessarily want you in their restaurant.

12 But if there were places in local
13 communities, ethnically-based and
14 culturally-sensitive, I think that would also
15 greatly help people.

16 So I think if we want to look at
17 helping to feed the hungry, one of the things we can
18 do is try to do joint ventures, create ways that
19 people can feel good socially, spiritually and
20 morally about the food that they eat.

21 Also, ways that we can entice women
22 or men or whoever to use food that's being
23 discarded, to can.

24 I remember as a child from
25 Mississippi, my mother canned everything. We had

1 food under the closet, in the closet, in the
2 smokehouse, in the roof. Everywhere. And we would
3 eat the food. None of the food was being thrown
4 away.

5 And I think it says that for every
6 American man, woman and child, we throw away
7 300 pounds of food, which I think is sinful.

8 And I think this would be one of the
9 ways that we could also use food stamps, to
10 encourage people to purchase food from the Farmers
11 Markets as an excess, or even gleaning, and come
12 home and actually preserve and can their food.

13 I think it would bring families
14 together, and I know it would fill a hungry belly.
15 Thank you.

16 MS. WATKINS: Thank you. Frank, would you
17 like to give your presentation now?

18 MR. TAMBORELLO: Now is as good a time as
19 any.

20 MS. WATKINS: Okay.

21 MR. TAMBORELLO: I'm Frank Tamborello with
22 the L.A. Coalition to End Hunger and Homelessness.
23 I will be quick and merciful.

24 I want to hit on a few issues that
25 haven't been hit on today, surprisingly.

1 The USDA has been trying valiantly
2 to recast the Food Stamp Program and health and
3 nutrition program.

4 However, what health program have
5 you ever heard of that has one-, three- and
6 six-month sanctions. And these sanctions aren't
7 applied equally. They aren't applied by every
8 county. They aren't applied by every state.

9 And every time I've called to any
10 state authority, county authority, federal
11 authority, I've had as many different answers as
12 people I've called as to the nature of these rules.

13 But for those of you who don't know
14 it, because I think most people don't know that all
15 able-bodied food stamp recipients have to work now,
16 that if you miss a work fair assignment, you could
17 be penalized for one month. And if it happens
18 again, three months without food. If it happens
19 again, six months without food.

20 Now, would you do this with the
21 Medicare program. If somebody didn't comply with
22 some kind of requirement, would you say, well,
23 you've got an extra six months to wait on a liver
24 transplant because you broke XX rule.

25 If the food stamp is going to be a

1 health and nutrition program, it should be a bottom
2 line safety net. And there shouldn't be sanctions
3 like that.

4 And I'll tell you some of the people
5 who I have met who have fallen under these
6 sanctions.

7 There was a girl who used to
8 panhandle down by Pershing Square. And I found out
9 she was on a six-month sanction because she had a
10 work fair assignment at 5:00 a.m. The computer just
11 spits out a work fair assignment at 5:00 a.m.

12 Who of us could get somewhere at
13 5:00 a.m., much less if you're sleeping on the
14 street. You don't even have an alarm clock.

15 So to eliminate those rules and to
16 eliminate, really, all of the work requirements and
17 the three-month time limit applying to single
18 able-bodied adults, because it's based on this
19 persistent myth that someone can wake up from behind
20 a cardboard box and go apply for a job and be
21 working by the afternoon and have enough money to
22 move into an apartment by the end of a week.

23 The people I talk to tell me that
24 some of the barriers to employment for them include,
25 but are not limited to, having a huge gap of time on

1 your resume where it doesn't show you were doing
2 anything; undiagnosed mental illness. The fact of
3 being dependent on public transportation causes many
4 people to not be hired.

5 A lot of people aren't aware of
6 these things.

7 If the ABAWD -- And I really hate
8 using that word. I wish I could just retract that
9 out of what I just said. But if those rules, those
10 three-month time limits for single adults are not
11 changed, then states should be required, not given
12 the option of, but required, to use the food stamp
13 employment and training money to set up work fair
14 programs.

15 Now, if you call around California
16 counties, you'll find that as far as single adults
17 go, there's 58 separate food stamp programs in
18 California.

19 And you call one person, they think
20 the rules are one way; another person thinks the
21 rules are another way. And some of those places
22 don't have work fair programs. They don't want to
23 apply for food stamp employment or training money.

24 If you're going to require someone
25 to either be working or do a work fair project, I

1 think it should be an obligation of that entity,
2 that state or county entity, to provide a work fair
3 slot.

4 And that's all I'm going to say
5 about work fair, because there's a lot of bad things
6 that can be said about it, but the only good thing
7 that can be said about it is that it provides
8 someone a way of maintaining their eligibility for
9 food stamps.

10 Really, it's called Food Stamp
11 Employment and Training, but I don't know of anyone
12 who was trained at a marketable job skill on a work
13 fair program.

14 Some of the other rules that need to
15 go are the politically motivated rules that restrict
16 eligibility for strikers. Those were put in there
17 during the Reagan administration.

18 We get a call every now and then
19 from the Labor Community Services Center saying,
20 What's up with these rules. Is there any movement
21 to change this.

22 And especially the rules for drug
23 felons. One of the most psychotic rules that
24 Congress has come up with relating to the Food Stamp
25 Program is that restricting eligibility for people

1 who have committed a drug felony.

2 And just to show you that it's a
3 rule many people find disagreeable is that about
4 half the states have already found a way to modify
5 that rule or opt out of it.

6 There was a guy who was going to
7 talk here today. He decided not to show up, and I
8 think it's because he thought media was going to be
9 here.

10 He's a double amputee in a
11 wheelchair, and I used to see him panhandling over
12 at 7th and Figueroa. He had been denied food stamps
13 on a drug felony charge, even though he since then
14 has been through a recovery program.

15 And we had a state senator here, a
16 Republican no less, with strong conservative
17 credentials, who said, Hey, let's allow people who
18 have been through recovery to get food stamps.

19 And Governor Gray Davis said,
20 Convicted felons don't deserve the same rights as
21 citizens. Presumably extending to the right to eat
22 and, I don't know, perhaps to breathe. Who knows
23 what other things they shouldn't have the right to
24 do.

25 This has already been hit on, but I

1 want to reiterate it.

2 In our surveying, we show that at
3 least a quarter of the people going to food pantries
4 in the Los Angeles area are recipients of SSI. So
5 they're getting -- 692 is the new maximum benefit
6 amount for SSI since January. I think it's 692.

7 And the advantage of having the food
8 stamp portion cashed out is, of course, as has been
9 mentioned, it saves people an additional trip to the
10 welfare office.

11 But what doesn't happen is that
12 people with out-of-pocket medical expenses don't get
13 an additional food allotment based on that. People
14 with higher housing costs. The other kind of
15 deductions, the child care, et cetera, et cetera, et
16 cetera, that's in the food stamp formula, doesn't
17 apply to that internal food stamp allotment.

18 And it's our hope that that system
19 can be revised in some way, form or fashion.

20 We've had conversations about this
21 with other folks who have said that it could result
22 in lowering benefits for the other people in the
23 household if we changed the cash-out.

24 However, if we did it in some way
25 where it didn't do that and where basically you

1 looked at someone's need and not so much the fact
2 that they're getting, you know, this allotment in
3 the state supplement, that would go a long way
4 toward eliminating some of the long food lines that
5 we see in Los Angeles.

6 And then I just want to leave with a
7 passing thought. We've talked a lot about raising
8 the minimum benefit, and I definitely think the
9 Thrifty Food Plan should be adjusted to the year
10 2000 amount.

11 But I just want to leave you with a
12 little thought here as my friend, James La Croix,
13 who might still be in the audience, as he says, If
14 you want to lose weight, don't waste your money on a
15 Jenny Craig program; just apply for food stamps.

16 Thank you.

17 MS. WATKINS: Thank you. Mike McHale. Is
18 Mike still here?

19 MR. TAMBORELLO: He was on the phone.

20 MS. WATKINS: Geiko Escobar (phonetically)
21 He left. Lily Gorence.

22 MS. GORENCE: Good evening, and thank you
23 so much for being here and allowing us an
24 opportunity to express our concerns about the Food
25 Stamp Program.

1 I'm a registered dietitian. I work
2 for the Center for Community and Family Services,
3 operating a head start-program in the cities of
4 Pasadena, Altadena and Glendale, California, which
5 is, by most people's standard, not really considered
6 low-income communities.

7 However, I must say that many, many
8 families are eligible for our head-start program.
9 1,200, to be exact.

10 And as the dietitian that runs the
11 school, school food service and child care food
12 program, I just wanted to share with you what
13 happens on -- examples of what hunger and what
14 happens to our children on Monday mornings after
15 they've been a weekend with their families that
16 don't have sufficient food.

17 They come to school on Monday and
18 they're ravenous. And they have food fights, and
19 they empty every bowl that is there. That's every
20 Monday.

21 So it's joyful for me to know that
22 I'm helping to provide nutritious foods for them at
23 school. But the concern is, what happens when they
24 go home.

25 And many of the families are

1 experiencing back to work. They're getting the
2 kinds of skills that they need to go back to work,
3 and everyone applauds that.

4 However, child care is certainly an
5 important part of that transition and also having
6 enough food, sufficient food, to sustain working
7 families, and the good health must be in place for
8 these families to make that kind of transition.

9 And certainly the Food Stamp Program
10 will be very helpful and essential in making that
11 transition.

12 So we've heard lots of wonderful
13 reasons why the program needs to be strengthened and
14 improved and also increased access. And certainly
15 all those reasons are true, but really, for working
16 families, dual working families, believe it or not,
17 there's a lot of hunger still out there and a lot of
18 malnutrition with these families.

19 And so I would applaud the
20 continuation of nutrition education through USDA,
21 with the Nutrition Network and whatever other
22 programs come around.

23 And I don't know what would be
24 feasible really. I haven't given it a great deal of
25 thought. But certainly nutrition education is one

1 answer in helping families obtain nutritious foods,
2 by knowing how and what foods.

3 So I don't know what you can do on
4 the element. Not a brochure, by the way. I don't
5 think brochures change people's behaviors. Maybe
6 something more in-depth and comprehensive.

7 So I just wanted to bring the point
8 that our head-start families want to go back to
9 work, but they need to have food on the table.
10 Thank you.

11 MS. WATKINS: Thank you. I'd just like to
12 thank all of you for staying with us through these
13 conversations, this conversation today.

14 You have been absolutely fabulous,
15 to sit here and listen and wait for your turn for
16 your time to make your presentation.

17 I recognize that many of you may
18 have cut your presentation short because I had added
19 up the time. I counted about 45 people at about
20 5 o'clock. And I thought, oh, boy, we may not make
21 it. But we did make it.

22 And I am appreciative to all of
23 you -- Pardon me. We have someone else. Okay. I
24 am appreciative to all of you who have stayed to
25 ensure that your comments were heard.

1 As Julie indicated at the beginning
2 of the conversation, you will have an additional
3 week in order to get your written comments in.

4 Many of you know we had to
5 reschedule the L.A. Conversation because of an
6 extended trip that I had to make that caused us to
7 delay your earlier conversation in early August.

8 And not recognizing that we had had
9 the time set already, it was important that we let
10 you know that you will have some additional time.

11 We appreciate the hard work that the
12 staff has done in making sure that this worked
13 effectively.

14 We want to make certain that anyone
15 who comes in between now and 7 o'clock, that they
16 have an opportunity to make their presentation known
17 so we can have an opportunity to hear what you would
18 like to share with us.

19 One of the things that occurs to me
20 is that you've made some compelling presentations
21 today that will help us to improve the program. And
22 you and I both know that there will be a change in
23 the LEADER.

24 We are optimistic that regardless of
25 what change is made in administration, that your

1 comments will be so solid and all of us will work so
2 hard to ensure that we can make the Food Stamp
3 Program accessible and make some changes in
4 reauthorization.

5 We've got a lot of time. We've got
6 a lot of hard work to do, and it's going to take all
7 of us working together to be sure that what you've
8 committed to and what we, as the current
9 administration, has committed to do, that we can
10 make all of this happen.

11 And it is going to take a concerted
12 effort on all of our parts to make sure that this
13 effort does not go in vein.

14 We understood loud and clear what
15 you indicated to us that needs to be done. We will
16 be working hard to make certain that that happens.

17 We do have another person to speak.
18 Do we have a name?

19 MR. DOUCETTE: My name is Len Doucette, and
20 I'm from Santa Monica. And I came all the way --
21 I'm sorry, I got a little winded.

22 MS. WATKINS: That's okay. Take your time.
23 If you would, just give us your name, and then make
24 your statement.

25 MR. DOUCETTE: Thank you. My name is Len

1 Doucette. I live in Santa Monica, at 1038 14th
2 Street in Santa Monica. And my wife and I are on
3 SSI and, of course, we do not qualify for food
4 stamps.

5 We spend -- In order to stay in an
6 apartment, we have a gross income of \$1,065 a month.
7 Of that \$1,065, we have to spend \$750 a month for
8 rent. And the balance is for whatever other
9 expenses we have.

10 We have to pay for a telephone, we
11 have to pay the electric bill, we have to pay the
12 water bill.

13 So when we're all through, we have
14 maybe about \$140 a month for food for the both of
15 us.

16 We have had to rely on church
17 programs in order to get extra food in order to
18 survive. And I think that that's a problem that not
19 only we face, but a lot of others.

20 We are seniors, and we have been
21 waiting on a waiting list for the last six years for
22 housing. And the waiting lists are closed, and they
23 tell me it's going to be another five years before
24 there is even a hope of a place in subsidized
25 housing.

1 I want to tell you that food is very
2 important to maintaining ourselves. And I think
3 that we should be able to do it with dignity. And
4 one of the things that you can do it with is through
5 the Food Stamp Program.

6 I don't think that we should have to
7 go to the churches and ask the churches to supply us
8 with food because, many times, they are very limited
9 in what they can get.

10 They don't have a lot of resources
11 right now. And it's getting more and more difficult
12 for them to collect food. And more and more people
13 are unwilling to support a food program.

14 And I think that that's an
15 indication of what our government is like. If our
16 government will not supply food to people who really
17 need it, and especially elderly people -- you know,
18 I know more and more women who are living on the
19 streets, who are elderly, or in their 60s through
20 80s, who are living on the streets and just barely
21 surviving. And how do you fight that.

22 One of the reasons they're out there
23 is because they couldn't afford the rents, and they
24 ended up out on the streets. And they don't have
25 any resources in order to get food.

1 And I think it's really important
2 that the food program deal with that.

3 Maybe I'm offbase, but I really
4 think that because you're on SSI does not
5 necessarily mean that you have a good income and
6 that you are able to feed yourself and maintain
7 yourself, because we're not able to do that.

8 So I'm just saying that the
9 government's support in one way is a slap in the
10 face the other way.

11 And so what they do is on one side
12 they say it's okay, but on the other side they say,
13 well, you're going to have to struggle to make it on
14 your own.

15 I don't know what the Food Stamp
16 Program can do about that. That's my statement.
17 I'm sorry. Thank you.

18 MS. WATKINS: Thank you very much.

19 Does the gentleman behind you --
20 Cordelia, make sure we get the information on both
21 of them.

22 MR. BUSCH: Hi. I'm so thankful that I got
23 here in time to be able to make a statement because
24 I think this is an important area. I'm glad that
25 we're getting a chance to speak.

1 I hope you had a lot of comments
2 today. I hope that the meeting was publicized well
3 enough.

4 I hope that there were announcements
5 at every welfare office in L.A., and I hope that the
6 staff at every place that distributes food stamps
7 was given support to help the people who receive
8 food stamps come out and speak today.

9 Because I'm late, I don't know if
10 that was the case or not.

11 MS. WATKINS: Would you please state your
12 name.

13 MR. BUSCH: Oh, certainly. My name is
14 David Busch. I also live in Santa Monica, and I'm
15 homeless. I'm eligible for food stamps. I am very
16 poor.

17 I survive by distributing a homeless
18 newspaper, and I sleep on the street in Santa
19 Monica.

20 But I'm proud to say that I've never
21 had to panhandle, and I also don't get -- don't take
22 any GR or any government check.

23 I'm entirely self-supported. Just
24 because you're homeless doesn't mean you're
25 helpless.

1 One of the things in Santa Monica
2 that we, as homeless people, did is we organized our
3 own food program.

4 Every Tuesday, we organized a food,
5 not bombs, group as homeless people, about five of
6 us, with the help of a Unitarian church there. And
7 we fed 50 to 100 people ourselves for a year. And
8 we had to use shopping carts to pick up the food.

9 One of the problems was that we
10 couldn't get food from the food banks because in the
11 city of Santa Monica and in Los Angeles, I don't
12 know if it's federal regulations or what, but the
13 food banks will not give food to homeless feeding
14 programs, and they won't empower homeless people to
15 feed themselves.

16 I think we were told that you have
17 to have a registered kitchen and all of these other
18 things. And we had gotten a church to support us.
19 But the bureaucracy of us setting up that food line
20 and getting pantry support for our feeding program
21 was just a barrier that we couldn't handle.

22 So if there's something that USDA
23 can do to streamline that, to help empower people in
24 food lines.

25 There's 40,000 people living on the

1 street in L.A., and there's a big need for food
2 lines.

3 Most of the meals that I eat, I'll
4 tell you, I get out of a dumpster. Half the meals I
5 eat, I get out of a dumpster.

6 I don't collect food stamps for a
7 couple of reasons: Number one reason, the
8 bureaucracy of it is just appalling. The forms you
9 have to fill out are too long.

10 And truthfully, I just think food
11 policy in this country is shameful. We put making a
12 buck off of food in front of feeding people and
13 guaranteeing that to people in this country.

14 In preparing for this hearing, I
15 thought long and hard about why -- Maybe I should go
16 and apply for food stamps and take the stamps that
17 I'm eligible for, since I can feed myself by digging
18 through these dumpsters, and give that food stamps
19 to some of the people -- particularly I'm thinking
20 of a lady I know who has two children, who gets food
21 stamps, and she's just barely scraping by. The kids
22 don't look well-fed.

23 I don't think the food stamp
24 benefit -- It works out to about a 1.50 a meal, or
25 something like that. That's atrocious. That's

1 pathetic. It's absurd. People cannot feed
2 themselves decently. I mean, if you want to eat
3 peanut butter and things like that.

4 And this is a working woman. Most
5 of the meals and the food stamp programs are
6 designed for people that can spend hours cooking
7 them. It's just really, really hard.

8 And they say, Well, you can go to
9 the food pantries or you can go to the wholesale
10 warehouses.

11 Working people living on food stamps
12 don't have time, in addition to working and trying
13 to better their lives, to run around town and do
14 these things. So I think the benefit is atrociously
15 low.

16 I'm giving considerable thought to
17 just going out and getting the stamps that I'm
18 eligible for and giving them to this woman who's
19 also on food stamps because I'm so appalled by this.

20 Secondly, for us as homeless people,
21 another reason why food stamps are ridiculous is we
22 have no place to cook food. The stamps don't allow
23 us to get hot food.

24 That's absurd. Everybody knows it's
25 absurd. My God, when are you guys going to end

1 that.

2 We should be able to go in and get
3 prepared food from places. Nutritious food is
4 available, as hot prepared, and it would help a lot
5 of homeless people who are starving on the streets,
6 suffering nutrition, malnutrition.

7 It's a big problem on the streets.
8 It would help these people get out of being
9 homeless, certainly quite a bit.

10 Basically I would just say anything
11 you can do in this program to make it work better
12 for people, that should be the first goal.

13 All of this other stuff about
14 eliminating fraud -- The biggest fraud in this
15 country is corporate welfare. It has nothing to do
16 with feeding people.

17 And I hope we begin to fight that
18 instead of having to fight to feed people in a
19 country where we're throwing away enough food to
20 feed 200 million people.

21 That's my statement.

22 MS. WATKINS: This is a little difficult to
23 close out. Let me again thank you. Thank you.

24 (Proceedings concluded at 6:30 p.m.)

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1 STATE OF CALIFORNIA)
2) ss.
3 COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES)

4

5 I, Paula B. Renteria, Certified Shorthand
6 Reporter, Certificate No. 9374, for the State of
7 California, hereby certify:

8 I am the officer that stenographically
9 recorded the testimony in the foregoing proceedings;

10 The foregoing transcript is a true record of
11 the testimony given.

12

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14 Dated_____.

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